

2013 Golden Jubilee edition

BIHAR YOGA®

My Spiritual Journey with Swami Satyananda

Vishwaprem (Prema Baxi)



Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India

My Spiritual Journey with Swami Satyananda



1963–2013
GOLDEN JUBILEE

WORLD YOGA CONVENTION 2013
GANGA DARSHAN, MUNGER, BIHAR, INDIA
23rd–27th October 2013

My Spiritual Journey with Swami Satyananda

Vishwaprem
(Prema Baxi)

*Dedicated to my Guru
Swami Satyananda Saraswati*



Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India

© Bihar School of Yoga 2013

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, transmitted or stored in a retrieval system, in any form or by any means, without permission in writing from Yoga Publications Trust.

The terms Satyananda Yoga® and Bihar Yoga® are registered trademarks owned by International Yoga Fellowship Movement (IYFM). The use of the same in this book is with permission and should not in any way be taken as affecting the validity of the marks.

Printed by Yoga Publications Trust

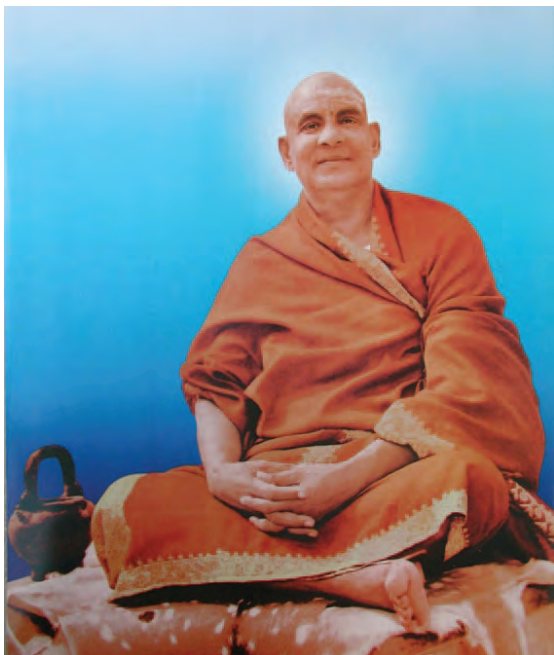
First edition 2013

ISBN: 978-93-81620-90-8

Publisher and distributor: Yoga Publications Trust, Ganga Darshan,
Munger, Bihar, India.

Website: www.biharyoga.net
www.rikhiapeeth.net

Printed at Thomson Press (India) Limited, New Delhi, 110001



Dedication

*In humility we offer this dedication to
Swami Sivananda Saraswati, who initiated
Swami Satyananda Saraswati into the secrets of yoga.*

Acknowledgements

This book is my *guru dakshina* to Paramahansa Sri Swami Satyananda Saraswati, to whom I owe a great deal in my life. He lives in my being today as my inner voice, my inspiration and as my prayer. Without him, I would not have been born as *Viswaprem*, a destiny that he forged for me. For you, Swamiji, in the fulfilment of an old promise – with *Sastang Pranaam* and love.

Swami Niranjan has made it possible to pay tribute to my Guru, to the BSY and to him. I thank him profusely for his guidance, the warmth with which he has received me over these long years, and for offering us the ashram to return to whenever we could.

I am also very grateful to Swami Satsangi for encouraging me by saying that she liked the book. In 2003 when I had shown my manuscript to Swamiji and sought his permission to publish it, it was Swami Satsangi who first had gone through the text. My heartfelt thanks to you Satsangi, for telling me that a book should have a message and, I hope this book does.

My profound pranams to Sri Swami Chidanandaji Maharaj for the encouragement he has given me all my life including the writing of this book and thanks to him for giving me his letter of blessings and allowing me to use liberally the materials from Paramahansa Sri Swami Sivanandaji Maharaj's published Works in Chapter 12 of this book on Spiritual experiences for the benefit of readers.

Warm thanks to Swami Sivamurti, Swami Nishchal-ananda, Swami Yogabhakti, Ajanta, Ved Murti and Durga Shakti for their support and inspiration.

Upen has been my guide, inspiration and a wonderful teacher. It is he who has given new life to Viswaprem by constantly nagging me to finish the book for publication. Thank you, Upen, for your support, encouragement and guidance. Words are inadequate for you.

Many thanks also to Vandana Siva who read an early version and guided me.

My deep thanks go to our daughter Pratiksha, who helped me enormously in every respect with the book. To her, I owe more than a mere acknowledgment can express. My thanks also go to our son Viplav and his lovely wife Shalini who went through the manuscript and supported me in every possible way. My grandchildren, Paripoorna and Sambhav, have brought great joy to my life. I am grateful to my family for unstinting support and love.

Heartfelt thanks to Madhusudan Baxi, my philosopher brother-in-law who gave me extensive suggestions, and talked to me at length about different schools of Hindu philosophy and Western thought. A number of friends and family members read the manuscript, commented on the text as it evolved and supported me. I would especially like to express deeply felt gratitude to Sammy Adelman, Hira Advani, Veena Bakshi, Aradhana and Girish Baxi, Nirmala and Ashok Butani, Promilla Butani, Clarence Dias, Prabha & K. K. Goenka, Mamta Goklany, Aruna Gupta, Annette Holzwarth, Manika Jain, Indira Jiandani, Rukmani Jiandani, Sitaram Kakrala, Meena and Kuldip Kawatra, Sunil Kewalramani, Bharati Kharod, Uma Malhotra, Elizabeth and Ken Nielsen, Abdul & Loraine Paliwala, Lady Pramila and Lord Bhikhu Parekh, Asha & R.S. Prasad, Shirin Rai and Jeremy, Shalini Randeria, Kumud Shetty, Manoj Kr. Sinha, Chandra and Bhagu Tejawani, Sharna Wadia, among other friends who encouraged me enormously to publish the book.

I hugely miss Ma Dharmashakti and Triveni Rana, whose loss I cannot come to terms with. They would have been, I am sure, very happy to see the book published. I also greatly miss my childhood dear friend Swami Atmananda who would have been happy to see the book.

To my parents whom I miss very much, thank you for allowing me to discover the wealth of Swamiji's learning, and to my brothers and sisters, for being an integral part of this exciting and meaningful journey.

To all those who supported me, whom I have not have named individually, profound thanks.

Last but not the least my thanks to Yoga Publications Trust and their cheerful staff who brought this dream to reality.

—*Viswaprem*

Contents

Preface	<i>xiii</i>
---------	-------------

Part 1

1. Spiritual Thirst	3
2. Correspondence with Swami Sivananda of the Divine Life Society, Rishikesh	16
3. Letters from Swami Satyananda	24
4. Meeting the Guru	35
5. Diksha – Initiation and the Guru-Shishya Relationship	38
6. Spiritual Name	48
7. Swamiji Comes to Mumbai	50
8. Desire to Take Sannyas	58
9. The Guru Encourages	64
10. Life Takes a Turn – Marriage	78
11. Tirtha Sthal: Sivananda Ashram, 1962	97
12. Spiritual Experiences	103

Part 2

Meditative Poetry	153
-------------------	-----

Let divine thoughts come from all sides.

—*Rig Veda* (1.89.1)

Preface

I begin writing this book with salutations to Goddess Saraswati:

*Ya devi sarvabhuteshu Saraswati rupena samsthita,
Namastasyai namastasyai, namastasyai, namo namah.*

I offer my salutations to Goddess Saraswati who resides in the hearts of everyone as knowledge. May She inspire me to write what is correct and what ought to be and may be shared with others.

This book began writing itself on 2 October 1998. As I sat at my computer in our home in Leamington Spa, England, I felt possessed by a strange force. It was as though someone was dictating to me and my fingers were just typing. I was not aware of the need for food or drink. In two weeks I had typed one hundred fifty pages. I was ‘emptying’ myself. Then the material lay there for over two years and I did not work on it any further. Everything was too personal: the guru-disciple relationship, the spiritual experiences, the torment of my soul. The few people, whom I am close to, read the manuscript, responded positively and encouraged me to complete the work. Still, I was very reluctant to work on it with a view to publishing it.

This book has gestated for over fourteen years due to my hesitation in publishing my spiritual experiences, particularly since some schools of spiritual thought in India

consider spiritual experiences secret and highly personal. They advise, for a variety of good reasons, that spiritual experiences should not be shared or discussed with others. Perhaps, in terms of the self, this may give rise to an inflated ego, which diminishes the intensity of experience, putting an end to any further progress. Such disclosures might also become a subject of ridicule, disbelief and amusement for agnostics and atheists, and could even create jealousies amongst fellow seekers, *sadhakas*. One may get involved in unnecessary criticism or publicity, distracting further while one needs to continue with one's sadhana without any diversions. I had greatly valued my privacy.

In April 2000, I went to Deoghar to get the consent of my Guru to publish this book. He very generously consented and asked me to show my manuscript to Upen and to Swami Niranjan.

Subsequently, I travelled to Rishikesh to get a letter of blessings from Swami Chidanandaji Maharaj of the Divine Life Society at the Sivananda Ashram. I waited for two hours outside the residence of Swami Sannyasananda so that I could request him to pass on my letter and manuscript to Swamiji. However, I could not reach him. There appeared no way of sending a message to Swami Chidananda before the evening satsang, and then it would be too late, since I had to return to Delhi the very next day. Heavily disheartened, I took refuge at the feet of the picture of Swami Sivananda at Guru Kutir, which was filled with very powerful vibrations. As I sat praying with my eyes closed for guidance as to whether it was correct to make this writing public for the benefit of seekers, suddenly, some magnetic force, almost alive, like the consciousness of a human being, made me open my eyes and I saw a beautiful, fresh, red flower fall from the garland that hung on the picture. A small incident, but it gave me great joy and a conviction that I would surely be able to communicate with Swami Chidananda.

I rose and walked to Swami Chidananda's residence. Lo, whom do I meet at the gate? Swami Sannyasananda himself! He recognized me. I had travelled in the same train

GOD IS TRUTH

Swami Chidananda



Sivananda Ashram
P.O. Shivanandanagar - 249 192
Distt. Tehri-Garhwal, U.P.

Om Sri Sadguru Paramatmane Namah
Om Namo Bhagavate Sivanandaya!

Reverential prostrations to Bhagavan Dattatreya and to Dakshinamurthy, the Divine Adi Gurus of our Bharatavarsha's spiritual Guru Parampara.

I am happy to give these lines of blessings to Smt. Prema Baxi's book written in an autobiographical vein. She recounts the spiritual inner journey of her soul as it was manifested and expressed upon as well as in and through the outer plane of her physical life in this world. She was evidently born with latent spiritual tendencies brought over from a past life in which she had already commenced her journey. Hence, early in life even in her young age there was a longing for God within her heart. This was enhanced and given a fillip through her correspondence with great saint and sage of the Himalayas, Swami Sivanandaji Maharaj, the well known spiritual awakener and the spiritual leader of our 20th century modern world. The turning point in her life comes when she meets an illustrious disciple of the great Guru. This disciple Paramahansa Swami Satyananda Saraswati of Monghyr. The experiences of the author are bound to be helpful to the sincere spiritual seekers who read this book about her spiritual journey.

I wish this book all success and benedictions of Sadguru Bhagawan Swami Sivanandaji Maharaj.

Sivananda Ashram,
Rishikesh.

Swami Chidananda
(Swami Chidananda)

SERVE

LOVE

MEDITATE

REALISE



as him, when Swami Chidanandaji was going to Munger as the Chief Guest of the Golden Tyag Jubilee Celebrations of Swami Satyananda in 1993. On this trip, it was such a great fortune to be able to talk to Swami Chidanandaji in his first class cabin while he was travelling with his disciples. He had been very happy to listen to my narration of my sadhana and spiritual experiences.

I explained to Swami Sannyasananda what I wanted; he was kind enough to help. At the evening satsang, it was wonderful to meet Swami Chidananda and talk to him. He remembered the train journey and said, “Oh yes, you are Swami Satyananda’s disciple.” He promised to give me the letter the next day by 2 pm and very graciously did so. How lucky I was! I was told that people had to wait for months before getting a response from Swamiji. Now I was even more encouraged that there was no harm in publishing this work. Yet it took me more than a year to overcome my inhibitions and reluctance.

In July 2001, I went to Munger during Guru Poornima after receiving Gurudev's darshan at Rikhia. I showed Swami Niranjana the manuscript. His response was overwhelming and he offered to edit and publish the book himself. How blessed I was! Swami Niranjana's greatness, simplicity and generosity were once again amply reflected in this gesture. This almost gave the work a finality and directions for me to complete and execute it. I returned to Delhi and started working on the manuscript all over again after nearly three years. But for Swami Niranjana's encouragement, this book would not be in your hands. A million thanks to Swami Niranjana for his invaluable help: without his blessings I could not have found the courage to bring a closure to this book.

This book is not my autobiography and I write this book in all humility. I am still a seeker along with others on this path and claim no spiritual achievement. Certain spiritual experiences occurred to me when I was just in my teens and continued to find me without my actively seeking them. Initially, I was amazed and even frightened by these, but I began slowly to understand the importance of these experiences. I wish to share some of them so that those of you who may have similar experiences are not scared and derive strength from the reassurance that you are not abnormal, as materialistic people tend to label you; these are common occurrences for people who meditate regularly and follow the spiritual path. This book is especially addressed to those who need a note of caution, encouragement and moral support.

There is another reason why I felt compelled to write this book. There is immense misunderstanding and ambiguity about yoga, spirituality and religion. While religion is embedded in rites, rituals and various moral taboos, spirituality conveys the basic message of love for the Divine and His creation. Yoga is not a religion. It is a way of life. Its beneficial effects can be examined scientifically. Yoga encompasses a larger philosophy; a dominant vision of human

welfare and points the way towards an overall development of personality – physical, mental, emotional, intellectual and spiritual which will promote a deeper understanding of life. Yoga is secular in its outlook and universal in its application. Yogic practice differs from religious fundamentalism and ritualistic practices. Its effects lie both in the domain of what is known today as modern science and in philosophy. It is this that renders yogic practices distinct from the ritualistic practices that define a religion.

Yoga does not look down on the material things you possess or enjoy. Rather, it merely cautions you to limit your material needs and helps you to perform the duties and obligations of a householder's life more efficiently. you need not change your lifestyle or any religious belief you follow. Even an atheist can practise yoga and benefit from it.

Yoga tells you that your body is a temple: respect it. But the body is not the centre of life. The centre of life is the living divinity, the pure consciousness, hidden within your heart and yoga teaches that whoever you are or whatever your religion is, you have to learn to connect yourself with this higher being within and make *it* the guiding force of your life. It teaches you how to handle the tragedies and crises of life, and maintain an equi-balanced mind with relative calmness. Yoga alone can bring peace in this strife-ridden world. Therefore, yoga should be taught in schools, colleges, commercial offices, government establishments and even jails.

The spiritual experiences I witnessed were a deep and moving inspirational force in my life. Knowing how I benefited from them, I wish to share these in the hope that it will help others along their own spiritual journey.

If even one person can get some help, guidance, a message or some inspiration from my writing, I would have served my Guru's mission and kept the promise I made to him long ago, to help others along the spiritual path.

I have not reached my goal or achieved any major breakthrough in sadhana, but I have passed a few milestones,

sustaining the effort along a lengthy, arduous journey of self-realization. Perhaps, this book in your hands will also provoke and promote a spirit of spiritual enquiry and metaphysical thought.

I have practised all the sadhanas such as: asana, pranayama, mudras, bhandhas, antar mouna, ajapa japa, kriya yoga, kundalini yoga, chidakasha dharana, yoga nidra, naamsmaran, ishta avahan, and different methods of meditation taught to me directly by my Guru. However, the main thrust of my sadhana was complete surrender to the Guru. I practised my sadhana with enormous patience and had complete trust, faith and devotion for the Guru, being aware of his selflessness and divinity. I was the clay; he was the potter.

It was this trust, devotion and surrender to the Guru, which continued towards his spiritual successor and my karma sannyasa Guru and Gurubhai, Swami Niranjana, that I knew this book would see its publication, when the time was right and he thought it fit. Therefore, although I started writing in October 1998, and gave the initial manuscript and other related material to Swami Niranjana in 2003, it is only now that the book has found completion and been chosen for publication. This further strengthens my conviction that with complete faith and trust in the Guru, one can capture the Divine Grace, even as one gets soaked in the rain once the umbrella is removed.

Viswaprem

15 April 2013, Delhi

Part 1

1

Spiritual Thirst

I was reflective since the age of ten or eleven. I would sit quietly and reflect on existential questions about the meaning and purpose of my birth. Instead of playing with other children, I would sit with some elderly person and ask him or her questions like:

Who am I?
Where have I come from?
Where will I go after I die?
What is the purpose of life?
Is there a God?

More questions came later in life:

Why is there so much evil and suffering in this world?
How can we remove pain and suffering?
If God created this world, why did God not envisage a better script?
Why do the wicked survive and the virtuous suffer?
If everything happens according to the Will of God, how can it be the Will of God when a woman is raped, tortured and murdered?
What kind of a God is it that allows such evil to thrive?
Is God an individual Being or an Infinite One, a doer or a witness?

What is the beginning of this world?
How, why and when did God create this world?
What did His first manifested form look like?
Is this world real or unreal like a dream?
Do we survive after death?
Do I have an eternal soul or am I just a body and mind
and is everything over when I die?
What does this soul look like?
If the soul is infinite, how does it transmigrate during
one's death like an individual finite being?
How does infinite God reside in a finite human heart?
Like an ocean in a small vessel?
Is this universe eternal or will it end in complete
destruction some day?
What was first: the seed or the tree; the egg or the
chicken?
Or, are these without beginnings as dreams are: and
therefore, as unreal?
Is this life then, really a long dream of seventy to eighty
or one hundred years?
Do we really come to this world to learn some lessons
in the school of life and to evolve our souls until we
experience our divinity?
Are there other planes of consciousness?
Is there a terrestrial world that is our real home, which is
more permanent?
Are we only visitors to this earth?
How long do we live there before we are re-born and
what we do there?
Do we have freedom of will and options to choose from?
Do the laws of nature or destiny also govern our options?
Is there reincarnation?
Who was I in my last birth and who was my guru then?
What is mind?
What is consciousness?
What is energy?
What is life?

What are pranas?
What is an individual soul?
What are time and space?
Who sees the dreams when the eyes are closed in sleep?
What is this dream space?
When I wake up I remember that I slept well. Was I awake even in sleep?
What is this 'I' that is awake even when I sleep?
What is the connection between the silent witness of deep sleep and the 'I' of the waking state?
What is the nature of this awareness?

I queried:

What gives rise to the emotions of thought, passion, jealousy and greed?
What gives so much force to thoughts?
The same mind thinks noble thoughts and the same mind plunges into lower impulses. Will the mind ever be completely divine?
Why are we told to awaken higher consciousness?
Is it not already awake?
Are there higher laws of nature like, 'as you sow, so you reap', which are independent of the laws made or the verdicts given by the lawmakers of a country and which apply to all human conduct universally?
What is the law of karma?
Is it fair that one should be punished for what one may have done in a past birth and which one does not even remember?
Or, is this life simply a joint in the chain of many lives like different chapters of a single book.
If this life is the beginning and the end, as atheists believe, why is a baby born in a poor family to suffer from its very birth and another baby born in an affluent family to enjoy all comforts?

If this is due to social order, why has the social order been like this from the beginning of the world? Did nature itself intend such disparity in order to evolve or punish souls based on the law of karma?

What place does compassion then have in the scheme of this eternal law?

I wondered:

Why is a soul born in a particular country, have a particular religion, sex or looks, and apparently has absolutely no control over the choice of parents one would like to have?

I lamented:

The journey of life begins with birth and ends in death; one never knows at which moment one will die and in what circumstances, where or how.

If death is the end of life, why is there all this fuss about marriage, children or property?

If one day, suddenly, without even a moment's notice, we have to leave everything behind, even this body, why hanker after power, position and wealth?

Why this struggle and blood bath for an uncertain span of life?

Such questions assailed my mind. I was very restless. The spiritual awakening, which began from the depths of my consciousness made me sleepless, and I was not interested as others were, in the normal things of life: cinema, friends, novels, good clothes, jewelry and fashion. My family noticed that I was different from my brothers and sisters. I had no interest in household work or cooking and I was often lost in contemplation.

Perhaps my family who could not engage with my inner language would not have indulged me had I not worked and earned a salary while I was still quite young. It must

have been difficult for them to witness a young daughter's detachment from the domestic, or what was considered the duty of a woman towards her family, in those days. Still, I was lucky to be loved well by my family.

My family migrated from Sehwan, Sindh, during the Partition of India and Pakistan in 1947, and we had to leave all our property behind. My parents were religious, God-fearing people and believed in the teachings of Guru Nanak. My father, Dr Parsram Jiandani, like my grandfather, Dr Khiomal, was a very good doctor. However, my father rejected mainstream medical practice. He was very kind and charged nominal fees from his patients. Even in Sindh, he chose much to his father's displeasure, to practise in small villages and serve poor people instead of joining his father's flourishing practice in Karachi. People could often only afford to give him grains or eggs or whatever they could grow in their fields instead of money. I have a few recollections of myself as a child, such as enjoying a ride on a camel.

We had hardly enough to make both ends meet. I wanted to become a doctor so that I could serve the poorest of the poor, but my father could not afford the expenses my education would involve. Soon after I finished my high school and matriculated in 1954, at the age of sixteen, I learnt shorthand and typing and took up a job as a secretary. Thus, I started supporting a large family when I was barely a teenager. Earning money however, did not satisfy me, and the self-enquiry continued:

Who am I

Am I the thread in the cloth
Am I the gold in the ornament
Am I the clay in a pot
Am I the hidden butter in milk
Am I the latent fire in wood?
Or, am I the one manifested in many
Like the light in innumerable lamps?

Am I a bubble or a wave
Dancing on the bosom of the ocean
Of pure consciousness
A spark of infinite light
A part of the whole
Who am I?
Am I merely a reflection
Of the reality in my calm mind
Just a shadow of the real
An airy nothing
A non-being
An ego without substance?
Am I the superimposed illusion
Of a snake in the form of a rope
In the utter darkness of
Beginningless ignorance
Someday awakening to
The homogeneous consciousness of
One being
Sat-Chit-Ananda?
Am I space in a jar
Limited by its walls?
Break the walls
Lo, the limited space
Becomes one with larger space
Soham Soham – I am ‘that’
One with Him.
Am I like a spider
Making a web out of myself
And drawing it to myself?
Am I the tree
Whose branches are spread
In this world
But the roots are up in heaven?
Am I the transcendental being
Or the immanent consciousness
In this creation?

Am I the one who experiences
The world in its waking state
Through the ten senses;
The five karmendriyas
And the five jnanendriyas
And the mind?
Am I the one who experiences
The dream state
When the mind and senses are withdrawn
Or, am I merely a witness of the mind
Experiencing the dream state?
Am I the one who reverts
To ignorance
In deep sleep
And comes back to the waking state
Remembering the joy and peace
Of deep sleep?

Am I the one who was awake
Even in deep sleep
And on waking
Knew that I slept well?
Am I a witness of the waking
Dream and deep sleep states
Or, am I merely a silent witness of the mind
Experiencing the three states
After all, tell me, my friend,
Who am I?
Am I the sun in whose mere presence
Creation comes to life
When it does nothing
But merely shine?
Am I the sky
That remains as it is
While the clouds
Form various patterns?
Am I the magnet

In whose proximity even
Iron moves and
Matter appears as a conscious entity?
If I am the knower
Who will realize the knower
When the mind will no longer be there to experience?
Will the knower know himself
By himself?
As when looking into a clear mirror
A little child sees her face
For the first time and
Knows what she looks like;
In utter amazement and delight
The real and the reflection are one
The mind revives back to sense consciousness
And remembers the identity
The physical 'I' is identified with
The spiritual 'I'.

I am aware of my thoughts
So I cannot be the mind
I am aware of my reasoning
So I cannot be the intellect
I am aware of my body
So I cannot be the body
I am aware that I am breathing
So I cannot be the breath.
Beyond body, mind, intellect
Senses and pranas
Who is the witness
The living light, the pure awareness?

But then, I am aware
That I am aware
Who is aware even of that awareness
Who am I?
Am 'I' the jiva consciousness or

The Being consciousness
Is the reflection of Being consciousness
In the mind
The jiva consciousness?
The fictitious 'I' is born
The real is forgotten.

Am I the bird
Sitting on a lower branch of
The tree of life
Eating the fruits of the tree
Enjoying the sweet ones
Throwing away the sour ones?
Or, am I the bird perched
On a higher branch
Silently looking at the bird
Sitting on the lower branch
Who am I?
O Shiva, I beseech You
To awaken from within me!
Nay, but You are already awake.
Who has to wake up then
From the depths of illusion and ignorance?

The sun is there shinning in all its glory
Only the clouds have to move
The sato rajo and tamoguna
To melt in their source.
There is no evolution
Only the involution/devolution
Of prakriti.

I sought refuge in reading. When I was fifteen or sixteen, I read the works of Swami Vivekananda and the biography of Swami Ramakrishna Paramahansa. These books hugely influenced me. I was especially impressed when I read that Ramakrishna would strike his head on the floor or against a

wall and say, “Oh Mother, one more day has gone by and I have not had your darshan.” Ramakrishna was my first Guru and his biography taught me, among other things, to value the simplicity mirrored in children.

I perceived the impermanent and transitory nature of the world with sadness. Everything was in a state of flux and would change. Joy and sorrow did not last forever. After night the dawn is sure to arrive. What there is today will not be there tomorrow. Nay, what is there at this moment is not there at the very next. This beautiful flower that I see will fade away; the clouds forming lovely shapes in the sky will move away; the seasons will come and go; the trees, laden with fresh leaves today, will shed them tomorrow. After a few hundred years, there will be nothing of the world, as we know it now. Even the geographical features of countries will change; the rivers will change their courses; the forces of nature, like the volcanoes, avalanches, floods and tornadoes, will change the landscape of the earth. Like changing scenes in a dream, everything will disappear after a while. The present will leave only a dreamlike memory and become history.

How strange to disappear from this world after death and to return again in a different form; the same earth, billions of years old; the same souls, only in different forms, completing unfinished jobs, learning new lessons; souls from different planes coming together and forming families and friendships; concluding the business of give and take. What a mind-boggling drama. Someone dear to me in this life could have been my enemy in my past life.

I also perceived with dismay that there was suffering, pain and disease; there was old age and death. The history of humankind repeated the same story of being born, growing up, marrying, having children, getting old and dying; the lust for money, sex, power and position; wars, murders, crimes and cruelty; greed, jealousy, passion, attachment, ego, desire and evil – all these repetitions have been since time immemorial on the landscape of creation, on its wide

screen; even as clouds of various hues and shapes appear and disappear in the vast sky.

The saints, like cleaners, swept the place a little and invoked peace and love, while the evil ones gleefully went on with their crusade against humanity. There are so many instances in history when even prophets and the descendants of divinity underwent suffering and pain and even bore the Cross at the hands of cruel, ignorant people. Why, oh God, why? Why this horrendous play of cruelty? The animal has physically evolved into a man. How long will it take for the animal in man to die and for a man to turn into a true human being before he dreams of becoming divine? What can cure the human consciousness of its passion and desire, of its selfishness and greed, of its cruelty and brutality?

What a lofty realization, which only a human being can achieve. I am an ocean of life, and as infinite life, I exist in every tiny speck of creation. I only need to dissolve the little ego to feel oneness with the ocean of life. The ego is still the ego; the wave is still the wave; but it can have the unique experience of being one with the ocean; of merging its individuality in the ocean and yet retaining its separate identity. There are infinite reflections of the moon in a pond; the moon is one; the reflections are mere reflections. How does the infinite reflect in the finite mind? Is this how the vast sky is seen through the eye of a needle? Or how one smells fragrance wafting through space in a garden? The image in the mirror looks alive although it is only an image. How is consciousness transferred to a mere reflection – an ego – in the mirror of the mind? We all are shadows of one reality. Yes, infinite egos in the bosom of limitless consciousness imbibing its qualities. It is only in the human body that we can experience infinity and yet have the thinking faculty. I think. Therefore I am. Yes, I am aware, therefore I exist. It is this self-awareness that differentiates human beings from the other species of this vast creation. Indeed, beyond the arena of sense consciousness lies the independent field of self-awareness.

What a mysterious thing the mind is. Is the mind, conditioned consciousness? Walls divide space. Remove the walls and there is only one space. Remove desire, attachment and impurity from the mind and there is pure consciousness. Is the mind then an outward projection of consciousness itself, and therefore, having inherent powers of consciousness? How then can one control and tie down the mind, the projected consciousness?

Nature gives a hint in the dream state. The mind has the illusionary mayaic power of creation, sustenance and destruction. The mind converts the impressions gathered while awake into living things in a dream. Everything in the dream looks and feels like reality while the dream is going on. What is real: the waking state or the dream state? When one is awake the dream state is unreal and when one is dreaming the waking state is unreal. Is the dream an illusion, the waking a relative reality and *samadhi*, the ultimate reality? The only thing that always exists in the waking, dream and deep-sleep states is life and consciousness. The only thing unchanged is the notion of 'I'. How mysterious is this life – the only seemingly eternal principle beyond names and forms. Only God can give life.

I further pondered. Is nature a manifested form of God, as heat and light are no different from the sun? How mysterious is nature! How a child grows in a mother's womb; how nature provides the child with milk from the mother's breasts at its very birth! How a seed grows into a tree! How no two things are identical! How breathing is automatic! Indeed all our bodily functions work without any effort on our part. What gives the cells the intelligence to repair or to defend the body?

Something that is real always exists. Reality must have a continuous existence and experience. If in a dream, the individual mind can change impressions, mental images, archetypes assimilated during the waking state into real living things and feelings, could it not be possible that there is a universal mind and that universal mind which is the

totality of all minds, is converting a script of massive ideas and symbols into real-world experiences for everyone? But who is the author of this gigantic script which like an open drama goes on endlessly expanding by freedom of action exercised by individuals? So that the idea of the world was already in the universal mind and that universal mind is making the impression of the world alive for all humanity during the waking state. Is this script, the massive symbols and prototypes in the womb of time and space, the eternal cause which gives rise to one's destiny? To everything that happens in creation?

Does nature have to possess the dual characteristics of light and darkness, good and evil, joy and sorrow, like two sides of one coin? Is nature an interaction between the three gunas: sattwa, rajas and tamas?

Such was the intensity and speed of my abrupt and haphazard non-stop thinking. Where were the answers? Where should I go? I read a lot. The restlessness was killing me. Spiritual pain was tormenting my soul. I never imagined that spiritual awakening could be so painful. I had no answers, no path in life and no direction. I had to find a guru, a spiritual guide. I had the simple heart of a child and I would weep silently at night and pray for a guru until my pillow would be wet. Had not my Thakurji, my Ramakrishna, wept and prayed? I will also weep and pray. I will find my real guru. But who is he? Where is he? How will I find him? I prayed to God, "In this world teeming with fake godmen, let me find a real guru, one who will give me direction and sustain me through my sadhana." I knew that my guru would himself come to me. I just had to be ready even as one has to be ready for that last instant of enlightenment.

My soul would cry and pour heart-rending prayers into my diary. The meditative poetry in Part 2 articulates this torment of my heart.

2

Correspondence with Swami Sivananda of the Divine Life Society, Rishikesh

In 1955 my prayers were answered. It was in answer to my sincere prayers that I came into contact with Swami Sivananda of Rishikesh, India, through letters.

I was working in an office in Mumbai, where a huge picture of Swami Sivananda was hung. The proprietor, Krishna Idnani, would burn incense before the picture every morning immediately on entering the office. One day, I asked him whose picture it was. He said it was the picture of Swami Sivananda, a great living saint of that time.

I asked him whether Swami Sivananda himself would answer my letters if I wrote to him. He replied, “He most certainly will.” So, I wrote a letter in English addressing it to Swami Sivananda, wherein I said that I had everything in life – health, money, loving parents and a good family. Yet I felt a strange emptiness within me, as if I had lost something and was restless to find it. Shortly thereafter, I was delighted to receive his reply. It was addressed to my maiden name, Sita, given to me by my parents.

The letter was typed and it was signed, ‘Thy Own Self Sivananda’. He told me to lead a spiritual life of japa, meditation, asanas, pranayama, to fill my spiritual diary every day, to help others and to perform charity. The thrust of his teachings was that one should work very hard in order to purify oneself; and when the mind is purified through selfless work, the inner light shines of its own accord.

He emphasized charity and helping others, and to see God in all creation. He himself was an extremely generous human being and gave with both hands gifts of books, clothes, sweets, and so on, to everyone, even when he knew some people exploited his generosity. He saw 'one' in all and there was no 'other' for him. He was a world-guru and a great saint. He brought about an immense, worldwide spiritual and yogic revolution, and produced several outstanding disciples of great enlightenment. How fortunate I was to communicate with such a great Master.



There was further correspondence and periodically I received more letters of guidance and encouragement. Fortunately, I have still retained the few precious letters written by Swami Sivananda over fifty-five years ago. Sometimes I would also receive a prasad of the vibhooti of the temple wrapped in pink paper; sometimes books would follow a letter, without my asking for them. One of the books I remember, and found very useful was *Sure Ways to Success and God-Realization*.

I have great joy in reproducing below some original letters, written and signed by Swami Sivananda himself in my maiden name Sita, at my then residential address in Mumbai.

ॐ

THE YOGA-VEDANTA FOREST UNIVERSITY

Chancellor:
SRI SWAMI SIVANANDA

P.O. SIVANANDANAGAR, RISHIKESH
Dist. Dehra Dun (Himalayas), India.

9th May 1953.

Shri Sita,
Bombay.

Glorious Divinity,

OM Namo Narayansya. Salutations.

Thy post card of the 5th instant. I am glad to know your spiritual thirst. It is an indication of the grace of God on you. The only thing worth-seeking is God and God alone. If He is attained, everything is attained.

Divine Life is the easiest method of attaining HIM. Divine Life is a life of prayer, Japa, meditation, kirtan, service and self-control. The 20 instructions (sent separately) will give you a clear idea how to spiritualise your life, and how to chalk out a spiritual routine for daily practice. Be regular in your practice. Have faith and sincerity. There is Lord's grace on you.

Thy own Atma,

Sivananda

A.



THE YOGA-VEDANTA FOREST UNIVERSITY

Propagates Yoga and Vedanta through regular course of
Tuition and Training, Correspondence, Publication
of texts, Photographs and Yoga Movie Films,
Yoga Museum and Propaganda Tours



P.O. SRINANDANAGAR,
RISHIKESH,
(Himalayas)

Chancellor
Sri Swami Sivananda
Vice-Chancellor
Sri Swami Chidananda
Pro-Vice-Chancellor
Sri Swami Krishnananda

July 7, '58.

Dated.....1958

Shri S.P. Jindani,
Bombay.

Blessed Atman,

OM Namo Narayana.

Thy kind letter of the 2nd Inst. I am very glad to note your keen thirst to progress spiritually. Yes, in the ~~lack~~ absence of a separate room, there is no harm in practising meditation in a corner of the room kept separate for the purpose. Slight variations in time of daily meditations does not matter. Try as much as possible to be regular and punctual. Strive hard to do as much as is within your capacity according to your circumstances and capacities. Do not go beyond your capacity. Spiritual sadhana should be soothing and peace-giving and not tiring. Of course, in the beginning stages one may find some difficulties and troubles to tame his surging mind. In course of time peace and meditation will become a very happy affair.

The mind pervades the whole body. Atman is Eternal and so free from origin or destruction. It is all pervading. It is within you and without.

Be in your own station-in-life and do as much as possible. The duties towards your parents etc. are not to be thrown off violently. They should be allowed to fall off automatically without any effort on your part. Be patient and be ever engaged in sincere sadhana. God knows what is best for you. Have faith on Him. Practice of the 20 Instructions is the best form of sadhana easiest and surest way to peace. May the Lord bless you.

Thy own Atman,



THE YOGA-VEDANTA FOREST UNIVERSITY

Propagates Yoga and Vedanta through regular course of
Tuition and Training, Correspondence, Publication
of texts, Photographs and Yoga Movie Films,
Yoga Museum and Propaganda Tours



P.O. SIVANANDANAGAR
RISHIKESH,
[Himalayas]

Chancellor
Sri Swami Sivananda
Vice-Chancellor
Sri Swami Chidananda
Pro-Vice-Chancellor
Sri Swami Krishnananda

12-8-58.
Dated...../95

Sri.
Sitoo,
Bombay, 22.

Blessed Child of God,

Om Namo Narayanaya. Salutations.

Your letter dt. 8th inst. Please be regular in your Sadhana. Don't take much tea. But you can take twice or thrice a day. Instead of tea you take milk at night, if possible.

Real life is nothing else but the Divine, because nothing exists but God, and God is love. Welcome Divine Life. Your sole business in life is to attain God-realization. All else is useless and worthless. God is the end of all Sadhanas or Yoga practices or meditation. Forget not the end of the goal.

Japa mala and Sutra ways for Success in life and God realization have been sent by separate post. Temple Presses enclosed. You can come to the ashram at any time after September. Please inform the Secretary before you come. May God Bless you.

OM

Thy Own Atma.

Sivananda



Chancellor
Sri Swami Sivananda
Vice-Chancellor
Sri Swami Chidananda
Pro-Vice-Chancellor
Sri Swami Krishnananda

THE YOGA-VEDANTA FOREST UNIVERSITY

Propagates Yoga and Vedanta through regular course of
Tuition and Training, Correspondence, Publication
of texts, Photographs and Yoga Movie Films,
Yoga Museum and Propaganda Tours



P.O. SIVANANDANAGAR
RISHIKESH,
[Himalayas]

29.10.158.

Dated: 195

Kumari Sita,

Bombay.

Adorable Mother Divine,

Om Namassivaya. Salutations and adorations. Thy kind post
card of the 23rd instant.

Immensely glad to note that you had participated in
the Opening Ceremony and Sadhan Saptaha of Rajnangam
(M.P.) Branch.

Kindly do Sadhana regularly, without break, EVERY DAY.

by way of Japa, meditation, study of the Gita with
meaning and Mahatmya, Seva of the poor, the sick, the
distressed, the disabled and the destitute, Mantra-
writing. Let the Mantra that you repeat be duly initia-
ted as thereby you will imbibe the Grace boundless from
your chosen Gururaj.

Feel that your office work is itself Sadhana. Divine
it by giving up the thought of agency or deership and



Chancellor
 Sri Swami Sivananda
 Vice-Chancellor
 Sri Swami Chidananda
 Pro-Vice-Chancellor
 Sri Swami Krishnananda

THE YUGA-VEDANTA FOREST UNIVERSITY

Propagates Yoga and Vedanta through regular course of
 Tuition and Training, Correspondence, Publication
 of texts, Photographs and Yoga Movie Films,
 Yoga Museum and Propaganda Tours
 DHARMC



P.O. SIVANANDANAGAR
 RISHIKESH,
 [Himalayas]

Dated.....195

proprietorship or enjoyership. Have the Bhav that you are
 but a tool or an instrument in the hands of God. Assert for
 yourself that all work is His and all is His, and that the
 Seva that you do is for the good of the whole world. You
 will then realise the glory of work. Let there be no selfish
 motives in the work that you do. Do plenty of charity.
 will be blessed by His Grace.

Go through my book YUGA MAHARNAVA (Ocean of Yoga) for
 illumination.

May Lord bless you!

Herewith Prasad.
 Kumeri Sita,
 Bombay.

thy own Self,



Founder-President
Sri Swami Sivanapada

THE DIVINE LIFE SOCIETY

[REGISTERED]

Propagates Yoga and Vedanta, and the Ethical and Spiritual Culture of India, promotes Universal Love, the Unity of Religions, the Ideal of Brotherhood, and the Spirit of Service, by Tours and Training, Publications of Texts, Correspondence and Propaganda.



P.O. Sivanandanagar
Rohankshi (U.P.)
(Himalayas) India.

23. 1. 59.

Sri S.P. Jhandani,
BOMBAY. 22.

Blessed Divinity,

Om Namah Narayanaaya. Salutations.

Thy kind p.c. of the 1st Jan.

May the New Year bring you greater aspiration, Sadhana Sakti and brighter Divine Illumination! May you walk on the path of Yoga with surer steps and realise the Immortal here and now.

If the game is played well you are sure to win over the shield. Even so, when you practise regular and sincere Sadhana you are sure to attain success in the spiritual path too. Of course you should not worry about the result. It may come this second, or after two years. He knows best and He shall do the right thing at the right time. Keep doing Sadhana with evermore devotion and sincerity. You shall attain every success.

I have already send some books to both Sri Ramath and Mir. Hope they have received them by now.

Herewith Lord's Prasad. May He fulfil your desire to visit this place. May He bless you abundantly.

Thy own Sir,

S.

Sivanapada

3

Letters from Swami Satyananda

I continued to write to Swami Sivananda in English but later I wrote in Hindi. Swami Satyananda, whom Swami Sivananda called ‘Swami Satyam’ and who was in charge of his Hindi department at that time, answered my letters. Thus, I came into contact with the person who was going to be my Guru and spiritual guide. There were many other enlightened saints living in India at that time. I do not know why I did not take anyone else as my guru. Now, I know that a guru is also predestined. It is a continuation of a long relationship, perhaps through many lives. I realized that meeting your guru is not an accident though finding a real guru is very difficult. One must have the requisite spiritual preparation and be ready for such benediction.

I started corresponding with Swami Satyananda (I will hereinafter refer to him as Swamiji, as I have addressed him thus all my life) in 1954–1955 while he was still in Sivananda Ashram at Rishikesh, and he began to guide my spiritual life through letters. The guidance and inspiration continued even after Swamiji left the ashram for a parivrajaka’s life. Thus began my spiritual journey in this life. The Guru held the anchor of the boat of my life firmly in his hands. He took responsibility for me on his able shoulders, even as a guardian does for a minor. Every little detail of my life was his concern.

Most of these letters were published in a book named *Lessons on Yoga, Part I* published in 1961. I therefore need

not reproduce them here. I only wish to give the following few instances to illustrate how the Guru, from the time I started corresponding with him until we later met, and even after that for a few years of intense sadhana, guided me extensively on every detail of my life.

Guiding me on how I should dress, Swamiji wrote on 15 February 1958:

Wear coarse khadi or simple, plain, white dresses. Gradually give up the use of silk and the like. Silk produces physical extroversion, consequently love for passion. One should dress decently, but not daintily and uselessly. Give up the use of cosmetics of all kinds, if you are using them. Simple hair oil is the only scent allowed for sadhakas. Go deeper and realize as to why I advise you on these lines.

Inner beauty is imperishable. Inner beauty is magnetic. Inner beauty is born of purity, devotion, faith, dharma and samadhi. Inner beauty radiates peace, consolation, comfort, cure and blessings. Inner beauty is real, everlasting and priceless.

He suggested:

Sleep on your left. Sit in vajrasana regularly. Start your day with japa and sumiran and end it in the same spirit. Sleep well; rest in Him. Soon after sadhana, place your palms over your eyes; you will be able to do away with your glasses forever.

Stressing on the need for economy of words, Swamiji wrote on 25 December 1959:

Talk only when necessary. Don't keep on parroting unnecessarily. What I am aiming at is essential talking. It will help you in meditation . . . Mental silence is not what they call 'not thinking'. Mental silence is really a positive state, when the sadhaka is either remembering the name

or form, instead of all and sundry things. You should fuse the mind in a central form and feelings. I mean *yaad*, remembrance . . .

No amount of bookish and verbal knowledge will reveal the truth unto thee. Dharana, then dhyana and then samadhi.

Encouraging me to remove the negativities of my mind, Swamiji wrote on 2 March 1960:

Never give up remembering, admiring and recognizing others' importance. This will purify your vyawaharic mind. Never, never and never criticize. Do not ever lose your temper. Do not boast about yourself. Talk of sadhana to those only, who are really desirous to know about it. Talk very little, to the point, with perfect precision, effect and confidence . . .

Practise pranayama along with kumbhaka. Keep the windows open during the practice. Don't overdo bhastrika, kapalbhati, sheetali and sheetkari; just a few rounds every single day.

It was amazing how the Guru looked after every little detail of a disciple's life and sadhana!

On 10 January 1959 he guided me thus:

Please dry your hair perfectly before you sit for the reception. Do not ever forget the use of deerskin: no earth contact during the period. Remove rings, earrings and hairpins as well as other metals from the body.

Later, he again emphasized that I should not meditate without a deerskin or wearing silk garments. He explained that deerskin absorbs psychic electricity and maintains the continuity of form.

Swamiji showed another example of his concern on 4 April 1960:

Don't worry about weight reduction. It is natural. Old toxic matter is going out. Finally new and pure matter will be added to your body. Take proper care of your diet. Roti, milk, saag . . . summer is in its offing. Stop *halasana*. Minimize *paschimottanasana*. Stop *bhastrika*. Continue *uddiyana*. *Sirshasana* – ten to thirty seconds will do. Continue all other *asanas*. Bathe twice a day in the morning and the evening. Also drink milk. Reduce or stop tea totally.

On 1 September 1960, Swamiji guided me on the technique of sleeping:

Never sleep as others do. Lie down and meditate. Let sleep come through meditation. Beware that your thoughts don't loaf and roam aimlessly, when you lie down to sleep.

How kind the Guru was! He thought of everything from dress, food, sleep to various practices of sadhana. His guidance was there without my even asking for it! My heartfelt gratitude to the great Guru, so humane and compassionate!

Strengthening my mind, Swamiji said on 13 April 1960:

Don't care if none gives you recognition. Don't strive to gain importance. Don't worry at all about what others say about you. Whether the world approves of you or does not, don't waste time in thinking rubbish.

Stressing on the need to value time, he said:

No holiday from sadhana; no reserved hours for sadhana; regular, constant, unceasing and in various ways. No reflections of the past. No anticipations for the future. Always in the present, immediate present. Keep unceasing engagements please. Have unbreakable peace and tender devotion. Be deaf to the world. Kill curiosity, strength, beauty and peace! Feel it within thee.

Regarding the practice of *nada anusandhana*, Swamiji said on 7 August 1959:

Just close your ears and eyes. Try to listen to subtle sounds in your right ear. Along the right is the channel of pingala nadi or surya nadi. The first sound is like the song of separation of a nightingale, sometimes in quick succession and sometimes in a prolonged rhythm. The second sound is that of a silver bell, which at once brings a vision of a starry night. The third is as though someone is producing musical notes from a great distance. It is a feminine voice, shrill and thinned out. The fourth is a veena. The fifth is a flute. The sixth is a drum. The seventh, the last, is the roaring of clouds, ultimately ending with the falling of a thunderbolt, as though at a remote distance. With this, the sadhaka is inside.

Cheering me up when I felt depressed, Swamiji wrote in his letter of 2 August 1957:

The whole world is your friend. You need not sit alone and feel lonely and brood repeatedly. Your future has been decided. Education, sadhana, service to mankind.

Optimistic about life, Swamiji wrote on 21 September, 1957

Always be happy and cheerful. Life is true. Life is a joy . . . Nothing should disturb the peace of your mind. You must become the incarnation of a perceptible smile and an imperceptible shanti.

On 27 January 1958, he guided me on how I should behave as a woman:

Girls have to be mentally strong, not merely careful. They have to overhaul the very system of their behaviour, expression and conversation. They must possess dignity of

soul. While understanding the weakness of other members, let girls give no room to its expression.

I received further instructions on 1 July 1958:

From now on it is not at all necessary for you to attend *satsangs*, or services in temples or congregations in ashrams. That part of your *sadhana* is over. You have gone a step further.

Encouraging me further, he wrote on 24 March 1959:

Have intense faith that everything will become all right. Don't worry and break your head.

The immensity of these messages continues to awe and inspire me. As a young woman, I learnt the precious lesson to preserve and protect the 'dignity of soul'. I strove to actualize 'the incarnation of a perceptible smile and an imperceptible shanti'. I reminded myself that I was never alone because the 'whole world is your friend'. And to be free I must 'feel it within' myself.

I started my *sadhana* in right earnest, much to the bafflement of my family, who resented my getting up so early and disturbing their sleep, which was natural as we all slept in one large room, but I stood my ground firmly. Their bewilderment at my strange spiritual obsession did not deter me. *Sadhana* and my job in that order were the two main things in my life. The world of gossip and entertainment did not attract me. I shut myself off from everything else.

I worked very hard and did not waste any time. My daily activities too became my meditation and worship of God. I lived and worked so that some day I would realize the divinity within me and find an answer to the question that had tormented my soul since my childhood: Who am I? I was like a person who had lost her memory and sought every moment, to discover her name and her near and dear ones. I too became similarly restless. I converted the little loft above

my bathroom into my meditation room to which I climbed on a little ladder. Swamiji sent me small posters to put on the walls of the little attic. Such was my desperation to be by myself and practise sadhana. I was not available even to my own family. Were not sincerity and perseverance the first conditions of success?

Through his letters, Swamiji continued to guide me and I religiously practised what I was told. Many of these letters as I said before, were later published in 1961 as *Lessons on Yoga, Part I: Letters to Vishwaprem and Satyabrat* (*Steps to Yoga* was its offshoot.) This was the very first publication of the Bihar School of Yoga in 1961. These letters were also translated into Hindi and published as *Yoga Sadhana Part I*. I have merely emphasized those portions of his letters, which indicate his care, affection and concern for every detail of my life for the benefit of those readers who have not read the above book. Such was my great fortune to have had a Guru like Swamiji who was at once a mother, a friend and a guide. He had compassion coupled with occasional sternness, generosity, vision and gentleness: the care and concern of a true human being. I had found an anchor and I was safe.

Swamiji accepted me unconditionally as I was, with all my shortcomings. His only concern was my spiritual upliftment, and a hope, that having divinized myself, I would help other seekers and thus work for his mission. I realized that a guru through his affection and attention tries to impress the consciousness of a disciple and build a rapport and a relationship of devotion, which helps the seeker withdraw the mind from unnecessary thoughts during meditation and make it peaceful in love and surrender. Such is the compassion of a guru that he wants her enlightened quickly and he comes down to the emotional level of the disciple only to sublimate her and lift her up to divinity.

Increasingly, the letters brought more guidance. Questions were answered and difficulties removed.

Referring to my long list of questions and doubts, Swamiji wrote to me on 25 March 1956:

Doubts do arise in every mind. Why did God make this world? What is the use of yogic sadhana, when even a leaf can't move without His orders? If everyone is God, what is good and bad then? All these doubts are such that we have no concern with them. We can lead a peaceful and happy life even without thinking about all this. Whether there is transmigration or not, how are we concerned? We have just to throw impurities out of ourselves. We have to sublimate lower impulses into higher missions. We have to fill ourselves with divine virtues. We have to keep our family, neighbours, relatives and friends happy.

But when, oh when, will I personally meet him? We had already corresponded for over four years and I knew him only through his letters. Getting such wonderful letters from him gave me peace and strength and made me happy, but I still had not met him. I had not even seen his picture! He said that a personal meeting was not important. One could meet and converse when the ego was lost in meditation. Yet the gross mind was not satisfied without meeting the Guru personally. So the longing to meet him face to face continued.

The letters became a way to bond with Swamiji's Gurubahen, Swami Sivananda Krishnananda. I met Swami Sivananda Krishnananda, a woman disciple of Swami Sivananda, at my brother Narain's home in Vile Parle, before I had met Swamiji, and I had shown her Swamiji's letters. Over time, we came very close to her and she stayed with us several times. She had reassured me that my spiritual evolution was safe in my Guru's hand, and that Swami Sivananda was very old and since he no longer travelled, I would have to go to Rishikesh to meet with him. However, it was only in early March 1962 that I had the privilege and good fortune of meeting Swami Sivananda personally in Rishikesh. I will later return to this divine meeting.

The curtain however, for the next scene was to lift soon.

4

Meeting the Guru

One early morning in October 1958, as I sat to meditate, I suddenly lost body consciousness. I heard a loud inner voice saying, “Come to me; come to me.” This was my first spiritual experience of losing body consciousness and hearing a voice within me. I was twenty years at that time.

In the afternoon mail that day, I received a letter from Swamiji asking me to come to Rajnandgaon where the opening of the Divine Life Society branch was being celebrated. I asked my father for permission to go to Rajnandgaon, which is in Madhya Pradesh, quite far from Mumbai where we lived. My father was very upset. He was loath to allow his young daughter to travel unescorted to an unknown place and live with strangers. He persisted that it was no use running hither and thither in search of God: God was within us and we should search for Him within our hearts. He refused to let me go. He was absolutely adamant about it. Why? Was it because I was a girl, and a girl in India could not go unescorted to a remote place even when she was twenty years old?

I wept and wept. I wanted to meet my Guru. Oh, after all these years; and I was not free to go. I prayed fervently to God and told myself if Swamiji were a real Guru, he would change my father’s mind. After sometime, when my father saw that I would not relent, he said in a light vein that if someone went with me, he would let me go. He knew

very well that no one would want to waste precious time to accompany me to a strange place. I rang up my maternal uncle G.T. Harisinghani who was a spiritual seeker, but he said that he had just returned from his Guru, Radhaswami of Agra, and had exhausted his annual leave. What a blow to my tender heart it was, but still my faith was unshakeable.

Again I prayed like a little child saying, "Oh Guru, if you are a true Guru, do perform a miracle." I asked my uncle to at least apply for leave and see what happened. Later, he rang me and said that his boss read his leave application, looked at him intently and then quietly sanctioned his leave. There was no time to waste; no adequate preparations could be made; no time to inform Swamiji that we were coming; no time to book the tickets.

When we reached the station, there were long queues for tickets at the counters and the train had only ten to fifteen minutes before departure. I went to a window, explained that my train was nearly leaving, "Could I please have the tickets?" The other people standing in the queue started shouting saying that their train was also leaving and that I should stand in the queue. My heart cried, "Oh dear God, do not test me like this!"

Once again, with tears in my eyes, I prayed, "Oh Guru, if you are a true Guru, get me the tickets or I will miss the train." The officer at another counter quietly came to my counter. He asked me what tickets I wanted and gave them to me. I thanked him hurriedly and rushed to catch the train. No sooner were we seated in the compartment and had paid the coolie, when the train moved. We heaved a sigh of relief, but an apprehension entered my mind: What if no one was at home and Swamiji had already gone to the satsang hall. Again stupid me, prayed, "Oh, my Guru, if you are a true Guru, you will be the first person I will meet when I reach there."

The date was 12 October 1958, when we arrived at the house of our hosts, Satyabrat and Basanti, parents of Swami Niranjana. Swamiji had sent everyone to the Town Hall. He was pacing up and down the verandah with his

arms folded at the back as if waiting for me. A million thoughts passed through my mind. How did he know for sure that I was coming? I had not even sent him a telegram because everything happened so quickly that I had no time to do so. Imagine my joy and surprise to find him waiting for me. How unusual was my first meeting with Swamiji. As I drew closer, I bowed down to him. My heart was filled with excitement and devotion. He looked at us directly. When I introduced myself, he nodded, and with his mischievous, playful smile and the brightest eyes I had ever seen, said, “Oh yes, of course. So you are here.” I was completely overwhelmed. Is this how a devotee feels when he experiences God in his vision for the first time?

I felt like a little child who had at last found her long lost mother. My eyes were filled with tears of relief and pure joy. I could hardly contain my joy – here was at last my Messiah, an incarnation of divinity – and I was standing in front of him, a most luminous personality. Had the Guru also recognized his disciple? Was it from a past birth? I wish I knew for certain.

Thus it was that on 12 October 1958, I met my Guru for the first time after so many years of correspondence. I noted everything in my diary. That I could come, itself appeared to be a miracle – a destiny which was to usher in a lifelong guru-disciple relationship; a relationship of complete acceptance, obedience and respect; a relationship which culminates into a deeper bond when all doubts and conflicts are resolved once and for all.

5

Diksha – Initiation and the Guru-Shishya Relationship

The memory of my first meeting with Swamiji is still very vivid; a young and extremely thin sadhu in saffron clothes with a strange light on his face. He walked a swift, electric gait and looked around with shinning, sparkling, diamond-bright eyes. I stayed in Rajnandgaon for a week.

During my brief stay there (12 October to 20 October 1958), Swamiji initiated me. Today, after nearly fifty-five years, this remains for me an unforgettable experience. He put his hand on my head and an illuminating electric current passed through my entire body. I use the word ‘current’ and not ‘wave’ because it was light and not just vibration. Was this how gurus pass a little of their shakti to their disciples who have to kindle this spark into divine fire through their personal sadhana? Then of course, there was the normal ritual of mantra diksha. I remember the little room in Ma Dharmashakti and Satyabrat’s house in Rajnandgaon where a small fire was lit – a symbol of purity, of a spiritual relationship between a guru and his disciple. This was a relationship of trust and devotion that was to last for an entire lifetime no matter what the situation.

Swamiji made me speak at various public functions. I was only twenty years old and very shy, but somehow the words just flowed from my heart as though the Guru was speaking through me! During my stay there with Satyabrat and Basanti Didi, little did I realize that I was staying in a house where

soon Swami Niranjan would be born, a person I would come to adore and respect as my Guru's spiritual successor! One who would guide thousands of seekers on the glorious path of yoga, dedicating his entire life in the service of the Guru's mission; one who would captivate the people's hearts with his wit, humour, charm, generosity, wisdom and great understanding of human nature. I was there in that house on 14 October 1958 and Swami Niranjan was born on 14 February 1960. Swamiji was then in Mumbai with us when a telegram arrived from Satyabrat. Swamiji was delighted with the news and said, "A great son is born to my friend – the one I was waiting for."

I met little Niranjan in Rajnandgaon in early 1962, when he was about two years old, a naughty, delightful child! He had somewhat prominent ears even then, and a twinkle in his bright, wide-open, mischievous eyes, very similar to the one he has today. He was a great charmer. I remember him playfully picking up magazines and papers and dropping them all over the place, clapping his hands with laughter and jumping around. The picture of child Niranjan is still so clear and vivid in my mind. And what a loving, generous and gorgeous couple Satyabrat and Basanti Didi made! They welcomed me, a stranger, as a guest in their house with open arms and unreservedly treated me like a family member! Satyabrat was very humble and completely dedicated to Swamiji's mission. Indeed Swamiji was Satyam and Satyabrat was his brat! He was truly named Satyabrat.

I discovered later that Swamiji had sent me my mantra in a dream when he was in Badrinath in June 1958, much before we met in October that year. He wrote about it to one of his other disciples, Sushila, in a letter dated 12 June 1958, which was published later (*Yoga Sadhana, Part II* in Hindi). I was absolutely stunned. Translated from Hindi, on pages 102–103, Swamiji writes from Badrikashram, Badrinath, in the Himalayas:

Last night I sent the initiation mantra to Sita (my maiden name) from here. She must be stupefied. This is indirect diksha. I will give her direct diksha when I meet her personally, because the gross mind is not satisfied without direct initiation. I have not met Sita yet. She practises yoga. This is a repetition of an event. She will meet me this year. One more event will repeat itself.

I met Swamiji only in October that year. How did he know in June that I would meet him that very year? Swamiji was all-knowing and a real guru knows his disciple's past and present. This is how the guru perhaps knows about the spiritual evolution of the disciple. Was there a previous life connection? It seems most probable from the fact that he said this was a repetition of an event. I discovered the answer in his later letters. What was the 'one more event' that was to repeat itself? I often wondered.

In his letter of 30 June 1958 from Rajnandgaon, Swamiji wrote again to Sushila (*Yoga Sadhana Part II*; page 106 translated from Hindi):

You know that Sita was initiated through the process of subtle transmission. Mantra diksha and dharma upadesha are received through the medium of the senses, subtle jnanatantus and through consciousness. In one, the guru remains in the gross form; in the other, the guru comes in the astral form; in the third, the light of the soul does this work. You were initiated at the first level; Sita at the second level. Diksha of the first level is for ordinary sadhakas; the initiation at the second level is for yogabhrashtas. Man does not give initiation at the third level. This initiation is given to one whom God Himself chooses. The eligibility for initiation at the third level depends entirely on God's grace.

One receives mantra upadesha in dreams and meditation through the medium of jnanatantus. One needs previous practice for this. Sita received diksha in Mumbai; but I,

(the giver) was in Badrinath that day. Those who practised yoga in a previous life, but left something out, have the right to this kind of initiation. Such a sadhaka need not wander. Gurus themselves look for such previous sadhakas who have practised sadhana earlier.

By saying this did Swamiji mean to suggest that I had practised sadhana in an earlier life and that Swamiji was my Guru even in my previous birth or births? That meeting him in this life was only a repetition of a past event?

Swami Chidanandaji also had told me that I had practised sadhana in my past birth. He said that I had the grace of my Guru, which enabled me to have spiritual experiences in spite of the fact that I had not performed sufficient sadhana in this life.

How blessed I was to find a Guru like Swamiji and be personally guided by him. I no longer wandered. I had found peace at my Guru's feet. His complete acceptance of me as I was, with all my faults, negativities, drawbacks and shortcomings, put a permanent seal on a relationship which was absolutely divine in nature and was for an entire lifetime.

Stressing on the need for a well-defined relationship between guru and disciple, Swamiji wrote to me on 7 May 1957:

Your address 'beloved father' is better and more apt than 'Revered Master'. Do address me as such. Do accept this relation also.

We get a glimpse of what a hard taskmaster he was in his letter of 17 January 1958 wherein Swamiji said:

I have accepted you as my shishya and I expect a good deal of spiritual firmness from you. I don't want you to be a weeping machine, a stock of emotions, a bundle of lower instincts, a symbol of melancholy and sadness.

On 15 February 1958, Swamiji assured me of his divine protection with these words:

Feel the blessings of your Divine Father. Know that you are protected at every step of your life by a strange mendicant. Intensify your spiritual receptivity so as to catch the waves of his affection and the particular care showered upon you. My blessings are always with you and within you. You can feel me and my good wishes in the very soul of your being. You can commune with me during meditation.

Encouraging me to keep up with my sadhana, he wrote on 25 May 1958, “you have already been initiated. You have a Guru. There is no doubt about your success.”

Swamiji was so generous. He continued to bless me, when he wrote:

I am your Guru, your marga bandhu. Remember your spiritual mantra. Do not lose sight of your road. You need not renounce; you need not roam. My blessings are always with you. Try to experience and follow them.

Indeed, a guru's blessings follow and protect a disciple like a shadow, not only in this life but also in future lives! The Guru's blessings have protected me for the last fifty-five years of my life! On the long journey of a householder's life, many crises, difficulties and obstructions appeared, but nothing could harm me. Indeed they passed away like winter clouds! I continued to march ahead on the path of sadhana.

The guru strengthens the efforts of a disciple. On 27 August 1958 Swamiji wrote:

I have made it a point to charge you daily with energy and willpower. The moment your sadhana is complete, I shall transfer the power. Be in tune with me in meditation.

Acknowledging receipt of a 'rakhi' I sent him, he wrote on 7 October 1958:

I have received your 'rakhi' as a symbol of a prayer for protection. I shall always protect you from whirlpools, tempests and dark forces. Smile, laugh and dance in divine joy; your father is ever by your side.

Assuring me once again, on 27 November 1958, Swamiji wrote:

I stand by your side under all odd moments. I assure you that I will protect you and accept your mental burden.

How kind the Guru is! Sublimating my emotions into devotion, in his letter of 8 December 1959, Swamiji said:

My exclusive interest in you is your spiritual enlightenment. That's all.

How totally and selflessly giving indeed is the true Guru! Swamiji noticed my impatience with my spiritual practices and progress. On 25 December 1959, he wrote:

Don't you feel that this bit of progress you have so far made, takes years and years for many others to achieve? You may not realize it, but I know it too well. There are those sadhakas also, who have struggled for years, achieving not even that much success.

Explaining why thousands of people practise yoga but do not succeed, Swamiji wrote:

The secret of your success is that you have dedicated yourself. Your divine force is rejoicing, because you have cleared its path of pilgrimage to a very great extent.

Swamiji cautioned me in his letter of 13 April 1960:

Your soul is taking flight. Let nothing interfere with its speed. Even a little *asanti*, disquiet, will completely undo the great achievements you have made so far.

Again, on 1 September 1960 he said:

The force, which was sleeping inside you, is waking up. It gradually possesses your being. Ultimately, it will possess you in full to the extent that you will not even remember yourself. The Guru is always blessing you. He is eager to see you enlightened. I am glad that you have so intelligently followed the preliminaries and higher courses of yoga. What remains now is realization.

I understood that one must define a relationship with God and the guru in a manner similar to a human, worldly relationship. It is only then that remembrance remains constant in one's heart. One does not have to set aside a time to remember a close and dear family member. It is this constant inner remembrance, which becomes meditation in the course of time and due to this, one remembers the guru and God at the moment of sudden death.

One has to be genuine in one's feelings. Yes, Swamiji was my spiritual father; but did I honestly feel that he was a father in the same sense as my natural father? Of course, the guru is also a father because he gives birth to your consciousness in the spiritual direction. Yet I discovered that in order to be genuine in one's feelings for God and guru, the most spontaneous honest feelings surging in the heart, were those you have for your closest friend and well-wisher which are based on psychic clicking of consciousness. So the relationship I built in my mind was that the Guru being my spiritual father, was my closest friend, philosopher and guide. I could tell him everything in all honesty without concealing anything. I could share with him my thoughts,

good or not good. Yes, he was the one at whose feet I often wept and sometimes rejoiced. It was this deeper relationship of love, devotion, trust and surrender to the Guru, and belief in his divinity irrespective of his outer behavior, which became the basis of my entire sadhana although I also practised jnana yoga, karma yoga, raja yoga and hatha yoga.

I tried to practise *navdha bhakti*, the nine steps to devotion, that Lord Rama taught his devotee, Shabri, in Aranyakand in the *Ramayana*:

The first *bhakti*, devotion, is association with the saints. The second is to listen lovingly to the narrations of saintly lives. The third is to serve the guru without arrogance. The fourth is to abandon deceit and sing my glories. The fifth devotion is to repeat my divine name 'Ram' with complete faith in me.

The sixth devotion is to control the senses, to maintain self-restraint, good moral character, and detachment from too much worldly work, and to always practise and follow the behaviour of saintly people.

The seventh devotion is to understand and see divinity in the entire creation and to adore and respect saints even more than me.

The eighth devotion is to be content with whatever one gets and never, even in a dream, see the faults of another person.

The ninth devotion is to maintain simplicity of heart and to behave with others without malice, to have faith in me in your heart; and to remain equi-balanced in joy and sorrow.

The Lord says, "O Shabri, the one who has even a single one of these nine devotions is very dear to me."

The feeling that I genuinely had for God was of being His agent. Leading a life according to the script of His divine play where I did feel the pains and joys of life, but learnt to look at them from a distance, knowing that this was the part He had designed for me to play. So I played my part without bitterness and with resignation. I always reminded myself that whatever emotions I felt, the anguish or joy, affected the mind, but I was not the mind. That is why I could survive

severe tests on my faith in God and my spiritual practices and forgive whoever tried to harm me and went against me. Didn't Swamiji tell me to practise saintliness par excellence if I wanted enlightenment?

I cried most bitterly in periods of grave distress and lost my mental balance several times. The strong wind shook the tree of my life, but with God's grace, the tree was not entirely uprooted. It took a whole lifetime to try to learn this single lesson of mental balance, patience, trust and surrender to God and to put it into genuine practice. Did not my Thakurji Ramakrishna say, "I am yantra, you are yantri! Live as a maid in a rich man's house." Yes, it was the shakti that gave life to this body and made me think, move and work. Whatever I did, I tried to keep this awareness before my mind, that it was the energy that was working through this otherwise inert body. I had to live in surrender to the Divine Will. There is no other way for one to maintain sanity. It was thus that I had defined my relationship with Guru and God.

How different is the guru-shishya relationship from that of a normal human relationship? In guru-shishya relationship, physical appearance, status, money, education – none of them matter. You are accepted as you are, for your own sake. This is exactly what everyone longs for in one's heart in worldly relationships as well, but unfortunately, most worldly relationships are based on selfishness. In a guru-shishya relationship, however, there is no selfishness, no expectations. The Guru is only interested in divinizing the disciple and guiding her on the arduous journey towards her own real Self. What matters are your soul, your heart, your spiritual yearning and evolution, your devotion and your surrender? It is a relationship of two soul mates at a higher level of spiritual affinity and wavelength where guru and disciple are united on all planes without any distortion in their relationship. I was indeed blessed to find such a rare relationship. I knew that the Guru loved me deeply, truly and selflessly, like a father loves a favourite child; and in return, I trusted him fully as being divinity incarnate.

This relationship did not interfere with other normal relationships. On the contrary, it seemed to enrich all other relationships. I did not have to give up anything; I had just added one more member to my immediate family who was very special to me, and I was richer and happier for that.



6

Spiritual Name

Having received the diksha, I was to be given a spiritual name that marked my rebirth as a sadhaka. A name by which Swamiji referred to me, and the community of sadhakas knew me. A name that initiated me formally into spirituality: from Sita I was reborn as Vishwaprem. In this benediction of naming, I was to learn to serve God in His creation selflessly and develop universal love and compassion in my heart. In whatever situation of life my destiny put me in the future, I was to treat my family, my friends, my domestic help, everyone in whose contact I came and even my foes, with affection, care and consideration. My path was the path of *prem*, love, and *navdha bhakti*, devotion.

My relationship with my Guru was based on pure devotion, faith and childlike trust. I was given the easiest path to lose the ego through *prema bhakti*, and when you lose the ego, the inner guru is awakened. It is the inner guru who guides you and cautions you, as though it were a real human being, as I was to experience later in life to my astonishment. From now onwards, my field of love and affection, compassion and care, was not limited to my family and friends alone. I was to extend it to the entire world. I was to respect life in whatever form it was in this world, and have the sensitivity and vision to perceive it beyond all shapes and forms.

When I asked Swamiji, how can one love people who are so wicked, cruel and have such malicious and evil minds,

Swamiji explained what he meant by love in his letter dated 15 February 1958:

Love all. Did I ask you to love physically? I only asked you to stop reflecting on others' misbehaviour, jealousy and evil nature. Harbour no thought against anyone in your mind. I didn't mean that you should submit and yield, shampoo and flatter, beg, pardon and sell away your soul. No and never. Love is a spiritual experience of the inner being. It is another name for strong and tolerant dedication. It can be best expressed in service to mankind. Servants of mankind know best the art of loving. It is also one's inner attitude to God and Guru. Love can be better practised by keeping the soul under a philosophical control.

It was thus, that reborn as Vishwaprem, I was to learn the meaning of loving and the art of living.





Vishwapprem with Sri Swamiji, 1959



Sadhana



My maternal uncle G.T. Harisinghani



Sita (Vishwapprem) and family



Vishwaqprem and father with Sri Swamiji



With Sri Swamiji



Sri Swamiji in Mumbai



Sri Swamiji in Mumbai

7

Swamiji Comes to Mumbai

I returned from Rajnandgaon, a transformed person after my first meeting with Swamiji, on 12 October 1958 – more resolute about my sadhana and aim in life. I was possessed by a strange spiritual intensity and nothing negative affected me. I continued my sadhana with greater sincerity, unmindful of criticism or opposition.

Swamiji came to Mumbai for the first time on 27 October 1958, at 12.16 pm by the Calcutta Express. He stayed with my uncle, G.T. Harisinghani, in his Santacruz airport officers' quarters for a few days. Uncle Harisinghani was an advanced sadhaka and had many spiritual experiences. On 7 November, Swamiji came to our home in Sion to stay with my family. It was wonderful to have him with us for three weeks. It was during this period that, on 12 November 1958, he initiated me into the techniques of kundalini yoga and said that he would take account of my sadhana from that date.

My parents welcomed Swamiji with open arms. It was such a great privilege to have him stay with us. He was thirty-five years and in his prime of youth – handsome, gentle and very charming. We would spread a mat on the floor and we all ate together and chatted like friends. Swamiji would ask for a green chilli and a piece of jaggery with his meals. Our flat was small, consisting of only one large bedroom and a long rectangular drawing room, where my father, Parsram Jiandaniran, had his dispensary. Swamiji adjusted very well

and slept in the drawing room on a wooden divan near the main door of the flat while my father slept at the other side of the room. It was the same drawing room, which would later be filled with dozens of people thronging for Swamiji's darshan and to listen to his talks.

We arranged several satsangs for him. Among other places, Swamiji spoke at Govind Dham, Sadhana Ashram, Lakshmi Narayan Temple in Santa Cruz, Panchayat Hall and Guru Nanak Darbar in Sion. Then at Chembur, Jyoti Bhavan, Sindh Model Schools, K. J. Khilnani School, and so on. Swamiji graced the homes of many devotees including that of film actress, Sadhana Shivdasani, who also learnt yoga.

On 27 November, we went to the Films Division at Peddar Road, where I worked at the time, and saw a few documentary films – 'Madurai', 'Konarak', 'Tajmahal' and 'Yoga – Pilgrimage to Freedom'. Three weeks passed so very swiftly. Swamiji left Mumbai on 28 November for Burhanpur at 6.30 pm by the Kashi Express from the Victoria Terminus station. We were all bereft when he left. However, he returned a year later.

Swamiji again came to Mumbai on 14 November 1959 at 7 am by the Nagpur Express. He left on 20 February 1960, for Allahabad by the Kashi Express. It was scintillating to have him with us for such a length of time. Numerous people came to meet him at our humble home in Sion. The drawing room was filled with a constant stream of people. Swamiji interacted with each one tirelessly. He was impatient to convey the message of the yogic way of life to the masses. Again, Swamiji gave numerous lectures and demonstrations of yogasana at various places in Mumbai.

My mother, Bhoji, cooked and served food to all who came to our house to meet Swamiji with great devotion. I was amazed at how she managed to do this within our meager resources. She lent me her support in all my spiritual endeavours. I can never repay her debt. She was an incredibly noble and religious soul who would not eat her breakfast until she had taken a bath and done her long

pooja. She also received initiation from Swamiji and was given the spiritual name of Krishnaprem. She was very devoted to Swamiji. Thus, apart from being mother and daughter, we were also *gurubahens*, sisters, so I was blessed with a close relationship with this kindred soul.

My mother could read Gurmukhi and Sindhi languages but could not read Hindi. So it was a miracle, that when she received letters from Swamiji, she could read them without having been formally taught the language. When I asked her how she managed to read Hindi, she replied, "I don't know; it just happened!" She died on 9 November 2005 at the age of ninety years. I had gone to Mumbai especially to celebrate her ninetieth birthday in March that year. I still miss her intensely, we loved each other so very much.

Swamiji also stayed sometimes with my maternal uncle, G. T. Harisinghani, who had accompanied me on my first trip to Rajnandgaon and later to Pathan Dhodgi. It was on the terrace of his Santa Cruz airport staff quarters that Swamiji shot a video film on yogasana. It was tremendous fun. As I worked with the Films Division at that time, I borrowed a video camera and bought some film rolls. Swamiji shot the film and when it returned after printing, he opened the film to edit it. We found to our horror, that it was not printed at all. I still remember Swamiji opening the reel so swiftly, filled with the excitement of a child, and then looking at the blank reel with disbelief. Little did anyone imagine at that time, that in less than ten years, this little disappointment would only be an incident to laugh over, as very great work would already have been accomplished by the sankalpa of one saintly man.

We had to shoot the film all over again. It meant more fun and of course, more work. When we finally got down to editing the film, it was hard work. No one got much sleep for those three to four days, until the editing was completed. Swamiji was indeed a hard taskmaster. When it came to work, it had to be completed before anyone could rest. His training in hard work and patience came in very useful later in life.

My elder brother, Narain, was very spiritually inclined; and he had also later become a devotee of Swamiji. He constantly kept company of saints like Swami Premananda and Swami Sivananda Krishnananda. I was his favourite sister since we shared common interests. My sisters Leela, Rukmani and Chandra gave me moral support and my youngest brother Pratap showed interest in learning meditation techniques. My other brother Nanak also later on became very religious. Swamiji was quite fond of the three daughters of my brother Narain, Padam, Maya and Rita whom he christened as Faith, Charity and Love.

I attended various sadhana camps periodically. One of these was in May 1959 at a place called Pathan Dhodgi, when among few others, Basanti didi, her sister Ratna, Satyabrat and my uncle G.T. Harisinghani were also with us. It was here that I fell very ill. It was very hot and uncomfortable. We had come for a quiet sadhana but I developed a high fever. I had to return to work in Mumbai, but the fever would not come down. Swamiji laughed and said to me, "Vishwaprem, give me your fever." Miraculously, my fever was gone by evening, but next morning Swamiji had high fever and could not eat or drink or open his eyes. I was devastated that Swamiji had to suffer for me by taking my illness upon himself, but there was no alternative. My maternal uncle, who accompanied me, and I had to rejoin our official duties in Mumbai. I wondered: How can one transfer another's illness to oneself?

For our next camp, we left Mumbai on 28 May 1960, and arrived at Amarkantak on 30 May for an intensive sadhana course. We left Amarkantak on 11 June, and returned to Mumbai at 10.30 am on June 13. The memories of the sadhana camp at Amarkantak left an indelible mark in our minds and added a milestone to our sadhana.

Our next trip as a group from Mumbai was to Rajgir in 1961, three years after I first met Swamiji in October 1958. It was here that I first met Ma Yogashakti who was later to play an important role in my life. I thus remained in touch with

my Guru and practised intense sadhana under his immediate guidance. Twice a year we met for some time; either he came to Mumbai or I joined a sadhana camp. I thus continued to live a normal life; job, sadhana and meeting the Guru for direct satsangs. Sadhana enriched my life and brought me greater peace and happiness. All my holidays were carefully saved and spent in increasingly intense sadhana and meditation practice.

One landmark of Swamiji's mission proved to be its take-off. We held a sadhana camp at the K.J. Khilnani High School, in Dadar, Mumbai, on a large scale for six days during the last week of December 1961 when Ma Yogashakti was also present with Swamiji. It was here that I first met Upen, who would later be my life partner. Participants arrived from different parts of the country. The Principal, Mr Balani, was kind enough to permit us the use of his school premises where some participants also stayed.

People simply flocked to have Swamiji's darshan, listen to his illuminating talks and learn yoga. I gave various demonstrations of yogasanas and pranayama. Nirmala Gidwani (late Swami Atmananda), Sarla Gehani, Hira Advani and I were the four young girls who formed the core team of organizing the sadhana camp. We contributed Rs. 10 each to start the camp. How this money multiplied by further donations and gifts in kind, we could never understand. Food was served to everyone throughout the day. My mother, Krishnaprem, would arrive with bags full of flour, sugar, rice and ghee, and cook the food.

Swamiji insisted that we give away everything we received on the same day. When we tried to persuade him to let us retain some uncooked food for the next day, he said, "Vishwaprem, it is only when you give that you get; it is only when you empty yourself that you are filled."

Miraculously, people would arrive the next day bringing whatever was required. It was amazing that such a huge camp was started with a minimal amount of money, and with the sankalpa of a saint, it was so successful. By this time,

Swamiji's mission captivated Mumbai, and people came in thousands. I was privileged to introduce Swamiji and his yoga mission to the people at several locations. When I spoke, I felt deeply blest because the voice was mine and yet Swamiji was speaking through me. It was as if Swamiji was training me in the art of public speaking for his future mission work.

I have taken these details from my diary as it forms part of the history of Swamiji and his mission in the early years, after he left Sivananda Ashram in 1955, and could make interesting reading for thousands of his later disciples. I only regret that I did not keep a more detailed account of this period.

When I first knew Swamiji he had no ashram of his own and he moved from place to place, never staying at one place for more than a few days. He did not even wear shoes. He wore torn or mended clothes, and a cloth bag containing the few necessities of life slung on his shoulders. He did not accept any money from anyone; he seemed reluctant to touch it. We arranged for his tickets and conveyance. I would cautiously save my pocket money, my monthly personal allowance towards this. He moved around like a true fakir and delivered brilliant, scholarly discourses. In his melodious voice, he sang bhajans, accompanying himself on a harmonium, and captivated everyone's heart with the rare feeling and devotion in his voice. When he sang, '*Manjhi, oh manjhi, kitni door kinara?*' (Oh boatman, how far is the shore?), there would be tears in my eyes and my soul would cry out, "Oh, when will my moment of enlightenment come? When will I awaken from the sleep of ignorance?"

Swamiji gave several yogic and spiritual talks in Mumbai and conducted a number of asana and pranayama demonstrations. I often had the privilege of performing various yoga exercises. I was very thin and supple, and my body could easily twist into any posture. Swamiji spoke in Hindi. I simultaneously translated the sentence in English in my mind and wrote it down in English shorthand and

later typed it. Thus in no time, Swamiji had his typed speech in his hands. It was wonderful to have that psychic link with him where my mind would catch what he was going to say almost as he spoke; sometimes even before he said something. Looking at his eyes, or from his gestures, I would know what he was thinking or saying to me. It was as if my consciousness was linked with his through the psyche and silence was itself a language. Thinking about this later, I realized that it was his gift to me so that I could serve his mission better.

There was an unusual light on Swamiji's face and a sparkling brilliance in his eyes. His presence was magnetic and multitudes of people were attracted to him wherever he went. Clearly, he was a man of God, possessed by a strange mandate from his heavenly Father to propagate the yogic science in every nook and corner of the world, and from shore to shore, thus bringing about a yogic renaissance for the benefit of the suffering humanity of the 20th century.

This was evident from his letter of 12 June 1958 to Sushila, written from Badrikashram (*Yoga Sadhana Part II*) wherein Swamiji said, "All the details of the mission's work are becoming clear to me . . ."

Thus, whenever Swamiji came to Mumbai he stayed with us and we organized diverse functions and it was always so wonderful to have him with us. He had so much energy. He worked tirelessly for his mission to spread the message of yoga and to serve mankind. He was possessed by a deep passion to remove people's sufferings and help them by teaching them the true art of living. Indeed, yoga alone could help the poorest of the poor, who could not afford medical help to keep fit and well, and usher in a positive way of life for all.

Swamiji taught me everything personally and painstakingly – yogasana, pranayama, mudras, bandhas, hatha yoga, kriyas, japa, meditation, and so on. I was very lucky to get such an excellent start to my spiritual life. Those early years of guidance put me on the right track. Most of what I

have written in this book, I learnt from him, and I believe, that the spiritual experiences that I got were also due to his grace.

I have no words to express my gratitude to him, for all the personal care and affection he so generously showered on me. I was his ward and his disciple. Everything that happened to me was his concern, and his guidance touched every area of my life. He mentored me: what I ate, what I wore, how I dressed, when I slept. If I had a cough, cold or fever, he ran to my rescue. Once I was burning with a high fever due to a viral infection and he knew about it; one sincere prayer to him brought me relief and a sound sleep.

If I was mentally disturbed, or had done something wrong, he knew and offered his help and solace. If I lost my mental balance, he would extend a note of caution and even, a harsh reprimand. He knew when I had missed a japa or my morning meditation. He knew when I was making spiritual progress. He knew my mind, my weaknesses and my negatives. He was my mother, always ready to promptly clear my mess. I knew of no other gods or divinities for to me my Guru was everything. To him alone my prayers went and were answered. One sincere prayer to him, one genuine cry for help from my soul, and I got my relief. There was none other like him. I totally believed in his divinity.

Indeed, a real guru does not ask for anything from the disciple; he just wants to make the disciple similar to him. It depends on the disciple whether she can cast herself in the guru's mould. But where would my destiny lead me?

8

Desire to Take Sannyasa

I wanted to renounce the world and join Sivananda ashram when I was twenty years old. The *vairagya*, dispassion, was so intense at that time, but on 25 March 1956, Swamiji wrote from Sivananda Ashram, Rishikesh:

Never think of renouncing your home and vocation and going anywhere, even if someone tells you to do so a million times. Your home is a tirtha; your body is a mandir; your soul is your devata; and you are His poojarin . . . don't think of renouncing . . . I don't approve of your miscalculation. Please let me know that you have accepted my rulings.

In his letter of 9 April 1957 Swamiji wrote:

Renunciation of society or *sannyasa* is not as important for spiritual life as brahmacharya, service, dhyana and asana are.

On 2 August 1957, he cautioned me:

It is very risky for girls to live in ashrams. They need to have an independent career at all costs. Education provides them with sufficient means to live without being in anyone's obligation . . . In order to realize God, one need not join any ashram, nor need he wander hither and thither. What exactly one needs is a guide: that is all. Further, he should strive under the guidance of his master.

On 15 February 1958, he said:

Until you have evolved and learnt, you must face this world. Master the school first and then renounce. Renunciation will come to your door, when the time is ripe and when you are prepared.

What a magnificent insight this: ‘renunciation coming to your door’!

Swamiji expanded on this theme in his letter to Satyabrata from Bhagalpur on 18 April 1958:

One should continue the life of a householder as long as he is wanted there. If he wants to take to sannyasa, he must do sadhana. As long as one has not entered the plane of God-consciousness let him at least enjoy life in all its fullness. I do not know why we forget that we have come to experience the bliss of which meditation is a higher form and the world a finite expression. Dhobi’s dogs live neither with their owners nor at the river. They neither live happily in the world nor control the mind by meditation. They neither do sadhana nor lead the fearless life of a householder.

He continued along the same theme in his letter of 12 May 1958:

Don’t go to any ashram, math or mandir. You have asked me to lead you on. He has assigned me this task. Have faith in one God, one Guru, one mantra, one religion and one method of sadhana. Dissipate not hither and thither.

Dissipate not – what a powerful way to articulate the message of kundalini yoga! Oh! If God has assigned him this task, will Swamiji not complete it? I was overjoyed. I must be destined to get at least some illumination at some point in this life itself when my samskaras are exhausted. Surely, Swamiji

would not leave his divine assignment unfinished. Even if it were incomplete in this life, he would be my Guru in my next life too to help me reach my goal. That indeed was a consolation, a cause for celebration, and I was happy.

I realized that I simply had to put in some effort; ultimately it was the grace of my Guru that worked. I had full faith that my Guru would some day suddenly show me the light that was hidden within me.

Swamiji continued asserting that I should not renounce the home. On 22 May 1958, he wrote:

You should not even imagine renouncing the home, because of certain responsibilities, which you have imagined upon yourself. Religion that is born of failures and shirking of responsibility, would not carry you anymore . . . I am your guru . . . you need not renounce, you need not roam. My blessings are always with you.

He repeated this on 1 July 1958:

I don't ask you to renounce duties and home. It is not quite necessary for you or anyone to renounce home for the sake of God realization.

He explained his reasoning further on 7 October 1958:

Bhakti does not lie in renunciation. It is a limitless expression of one's all-round talents. Religion doesn't ask one to give up day-to-day duties. It only asks you to get rid of mental imbalance, moral evils and spiritual ignorance. Bhakti exhorts ceaseless engagements, from morning till night. Fie be upon that wretch, who underrates the value of work in the name of tyaga.

I urge each of my readers to ponder these remarks. Just think the message: 'Religion that is born of failures and shirking of responsibility would not carry you anymore'. Or

about the imagery of bhakti as ‘a limitless expression of one’s all-round talents’.

And think further Swamiji’s indignation against wretches amidst us who underrate the value of work in the name of tyaga. Thus for several years, Swamiji, through his letters, kept my vairagya under control and implored me to stay at home and practise my sadhana sincerely.

When I still insisted on taking sannyasa, he reprimanded me in his letter of 15 December 1958, saying:

If you cannot realize God wherever you might be, be sure, you will not be able to realize him anywhere else in spite of all illuminated souls leading your path.

On 26 December 1958, Swamiji wrote to Satyabrata:

You must have received letters from Vishwaprem. She wanted to renounce life and go to Rishikesh. I shook her all right. Her vairagya has been balanced. Why should she go to Rishikesh? Nobody should be allowed to renounce unless he has made remarkable progress in sadhana amidst the congestions and responsibilities of life. A sadhaka of this world is far more perfect than a sadhu of the ashram. One can go there for some time: that is all. What exactly one needs is to expand one’s angle of vision and understanding. Wealth, wife and children are not at all the sources of pain, neither is their absence the foundation of happiness. Real trouble exists in our attitude.

On 24 March 1959, Swamiji exhorted me:

If you can’t realize and achieve the divine knowledge while you are at home, I can assure you that you can’t do it anywhere else. The freedom, the homeliness and the security, which one enjoys at home, are absolutely absent in any ashram. Not only ladies, even men experience insecurity and an unhomely atmosphere there. A lot of

artificiality enters one's behaviour. None can realize God in an ashram if he fails to do it at home.

Swamiji emphasized this further when he wrote:

If one has a guide to show him the path, what more does he need? Know that no ashram has produced a superman. Supermen are the products of ceaseless sadhana, purification, concentration and unification.

In his letter dated 25 December 1959, Swamiji said:

Sannyasa will not solve your problems; it will only tighten the knot. What do you mean by 'to set out in search of truth?' Have I not told you that one need not at all stir out in search of truth? It can be searched for anywhere.

On 17 April 1960, Swamiji explained to me:

One need not strive to give up duties. On the other hand, duties themselves leave that man when he becomes considerably free from samskaras.

After the initial phase of deep vairagya passed and I looked back, I realized how true was all that Swamiji wrote. I might have ruined my life if I had left my loving parents and a secure home. What would have happened when the temporary feelings of giving up everything subsided? I would have done some sadhana and karma yoga and studied the scriptures and become a good speaker, or, would have even built an ashram, but would that have given me enlightenment or mellowed my ego? Or would sannyasa only have fattened it? Would I have felt more frustrated, as many seekers do, without money and security? Would I not have missed learning the various lessons that only a householder can learn and thus make myself stronger? Would I have been able to purify my mind in an ashram as I could do as a householder facing ups and downs of life?

Did not Swamiji say, “Bear insult, bear injury; highest sadhana” – the mantra that his Guru, Swami Sivananda, taught him. It was the rejection, the humiliation and insults that we face in life as householders. It is the adversities, the suffering we go through, especially as women, the patience, the forbearance and forgiveness that we develop which diffuse the ego. The very life of a woman is a tapasya and tyaga. What more penance could she perform? The Guru once again had protected me.

I also realized that a spiritual journey was long and tedious, involving tremendous self-purification. I was not going to achieve self-realization in a short time because I was not a born siddha. One needed continuous practice, perseverance and devotion. A spiritual life had to become a way of life and this whole existence had to be dedicated towards that goal no matter what one had to do in life. So, vairagya and emotions had to be balanced.

The freedom, safety and security that a woman gets at home, she truly does not find in an ashram. Ashrams have their own problems and human nature being what it is, even they are not free from jealousies, backbiting, malice, gossip and power politics. So it was perhaps better to practise at home, once one had a guru and a particular sadhana. One of course needs to exercise discipline and greater self-control at home because one is free to do what one likes. The force of Maya is very great. So when one’s meditation becomes deeper and one needs to give one’s full time to sadhana, one can withdraw temporarily from worldly life and stay at an ashram for some time.

Swamiji’s instructions about sannayasa thus influenced me greatly and it became clear to me that my destiny had summoned for me a householder’s life. I had to continue with my spiritual practices within that parameter. Yes, I would build my ashram in my kitchen, in my home, in my heart! I gave up thoughts of running away from home and sincerely took to my sadhana under Swamiji’s guidance. The enduring message of Swamiji remains relevant to me even today, “A sadhaka of this world is far more perfect than a sadhu of the ashram.”

9

The Guru Encourages

A true guru encourages a disciple in several ways and expressions. Swamiji encouraged me in his letters considerably, in order to sustain me through arduous spiritual practices over a long period of sadhana and to make me retain interest in meditation. I understood perfectly that these words were meant to inspire me and were not necessarily a prediction of my future.

I was lucky to have such a luminous being as Swamiji to sustain me through all the difficulties of life; to be totally accepted as I was with all my faults; to have a shoulder to cry on; to have a loving touch of consolation and help whenever I needed it. In his letter of 20 April 1957, Swamiji advised me:

Gather your powers. Keep your life pure and noble. Render your thoughts spiritual. It is unworthy for divine soldiers, sadhakas, to be led astray in this world of passions and temptations.

A few weeks later, I received a letter from him, dated 7 May 1957, encouraging me with these words:

Great is your aim; grander still are your efforts, noblest of all is your soul. You are not born just to live and die. You have a great mission to fulfil, and for that, every step of your life is a mighty system of preparation.

Similarly his words written on 2 August 1957, found me inspiration:

Always remember that you have a noble mission for which you are working and getting ready.

I will always cherish these unforgettable words from him:

Now that all preliminaries are over and you have been initiated into the order of yoga, Satyam wishes you a happy and absorbed spiritual career and accepts you in his fold.

For me also remains abiding his message of 27 January 1958:

Listen, you will be given what you aspire for. Rest assured. Do not land your soul into mad thinking. Just do sadhana and materialize the awareness. Nothing more. Empty yourself. Tune your radio. Unite your mind. The rest will take place when the proper time is due. I have already accepted you as my divine child. May you sing the song of divine truth unto all like Chaitanya and Mira. Do become the gospel of yoga unto all. Be a great yogini and help your suffering brethren by leading them to the real path. May you speedily realize the truth.

About the Divine Law, Swamiji wrote on 1 July 1957:

Your soul is all-powerful. Your Lord is also all-powerful. He is within you. You will be able to meet Him in meditation. He will come to you in flesh and blood. He will talk to you. He will take you by His hand. He will come to you. You will feel His loving and divine presence.

You have already been given a law, a dharma, a sadhana, a faith by His grace, which you should constantly uphold. You are expected to be true and earnest to your religious sadhana, God and Guru. Nobody in the world should be able to shatter your noble faith and philosophical convictions.

Explaining the concept of love he said:

Love! It is an inexplicable attitude towards one's ishta devata. It is not passion, not lust, not romance. It is an unceasing thirst, an unforgettable remembrance and an eternal application for uniting with one's ishta. Love is not madness. Love is constant awareness.

What I want is to awaken thy soul. What I want of you is to realize your prestige and glory. You are not a girl, a target of animal passion and a victim of romantic shows. You are not this physical body meant for exploitation. You are that spirit which, when awakened, can move immovable mountains, bring the dead back to life, bestow sight to the blind and command nature. Beloved child of truth are you. Never forget this great truth!

My dear pure coal! You are not coal indeed. You are an incarnation of inner purity, saintly sweetness and an eternal music bird. You are the bird messenger of freedom and unlimited freedom. I shall always protect you from whirlpools, tempests and dark forces. Smile, laugh and dance in divine joy; your father is ever by your side. (letter dated 7 October 1958)

The kind guru does not say you are a sinner; he emphasizes the divinity that is within the heart of each one of us and is beckoning us to respond to that!

Equally my Guru sternly cautioned me not to abandon the arduous techniques of sadhana:

Don't waste your Sundays in socials. How many Sundays have you wasted so far? Use this day in mouna, japa and dhyana. Never give up japa. Let it continue along with concentration. Perform asanas twice on Sundays. Keep the mind calm, there is no end to invitations. Don't waste even a single moment.

Understanding totally the psychological turmoil, which found me as I pursued sadhana, Swamiji wrote to me:

I assure you that I will protect you and accept your mental burden. Just speak your mind to me liberally, even if you have to write a hundred pages a day. I will never consider it silly and rubbish . . . Vacate all psychic compartments of this filth of fermented and suppressed vasanas. Then alone shall that be refilled with divine grace . . . I will never misunderstand your bhav, your purging and your emotions. I am your mother. I won't mind at all even if you abuse me. I know that would do you immense good. . . . I stand by your side under all odd moments. (letter dated 27 November 1958)

What an unselfish relationship and fantastic encouragement a guru offers the disciple to sustain her interest in sadhana: never have I encountered such a great teacher in my life.

Extraordinarily important for me has been his compassionate comment on 15 December 1958, when he wrote:

Pains and adversities are testing stones for our willpower and faith. Mental equilibrium in day-to-day life enhances sadhana and accelerates spiritual process. Nothing would disturb you, if you focus your attention on God. You can remove the impediments from your path by a single utterance of prayer.

Do become the gospel of yoga unto all. Be a great yogini and help your suffering brethren by leading them to the real path. May you speedily realize the truth.

What a tremendous sankalpa a guru can have for his disciple! He comforted me, now – he queried me, then:

Geographical distance is no barrier. We shall meet when the senses and mind would have gone to sleep and when we two would stand on equal footings. That is the plane of atma. Will you climb up these staircases one by one, until you are able to enter into *daharakasha*, the deep space of mooladhara, swadhisthana and manipura chakras? (letter dated 1 January 1959)

Explaining the path, Swamiji wrote:

There is no love greater than faith. There is no reverence greater than obedience. There is no bliss greater than the bliss of meditation. There is none greater than one's Divine Shepherd. Let the day come when you would become the master of your mind. Even as you see, hear and walk in dreams, although your senses are locked, likewise will you see, hear and know anything you desire. The mind is capable of spanning the gulfs between the past, present and future . . .

Yes, you are a magazine of power. Behind the flesh, mind and subconscious there is something in you, which is all-powerful and all-pervading. That something is purusha. It is known as Ishwar, Rama, Atma, Govinda, and is the essence of all that is known variously. The essence of existence is that which is in you. The essence of your existence is that which is enveloped by *avidya*, ignorance, *kama*, passions, *karma*, action, impurity and other similar mental cloaks. This atma, which you are, has the first cloak of *avidya*; the second cloak of *bhrama*, illusion, and the third cloak of *samskara*. This atma, which you are, becomes manifest in that state wherein all cloaks have been torn asunder, aptly known as *samadhi* (letter dated 24 March 1959).

Encouraging me to continue with my meditation, Swamiji wrote his beautiful hopes for me, which I wish I had been able to actualize as he had envisioned:

Yes, you will get illumination. You will get power. You will get that which others would like to have from you. The truth will be sung by a lady saint through the length and breadth of the land. Your touch will annihilate pain. Your speech will console millions and your *sankalpa* will help numerous souls. You can't die like millions of girls. You will live an immortal life amidst the saintly galaxies. Great shall be your realization. (letter dated 2 April 1959)

Swamiji warned me this path was not easy. He said:

Be above physical slavery. Be above physical recreations.
Never seek happiness from any man, matter, or event.
Seek it from within (letter dated 5 June 1959).

Clarifying my doubts and encouraging me, on 31 December 1959, Swamiji said:

Why do you wonder at the temporary vairagya that people develop for some time and which fades away very soon? It is because there is no one to help them to maintain spiritual equilibrium. It is not a matter of pity. It is a lesson to be learnt. This is how the mind behaves, until it has been submitted and cast into a pattern . . . The secret of your success is that you have dedicated yourself. The reason for worldly people's failure is that they are like logs of wood, tossing hither and thither amidst a great ocean of problems.

You are progressing. You are heading towards balance. You are becoming 'clear minded'. Your divine force is rejoicing, because you have cleared its path of pilgrimage to a very great extent. Be calm. Don't at all attempt at exercising your atma shakti. The time is coming when your mere presence will heal the sick, comfort the unfortunate, bless the seekers and guide the sadhakas. Veils after veils have been rent asunder. Clouds have been destroyed.

While the Guru tried to encourage, it was another matter what the disciple was destined to do later. Such is the infinite compassion and hope of a guru for his disciple. In his letter written on 29 October 1960, Swamiji continued to encourage me:

Oh yes, your Lord will come. The road is under construction.
The road roller is moving forward and backward.

On 18 July 1962, he wrote:

God has sent you for a great movement. You are undergoing preparations all round.

Such was the great and continuous care of a Guru for his disciple. Only a true Guru can do this. I did not deserve such grace and kindness.

In his letter of 21 August 1964, Swamiji reassured me:

God is remaking you completely for His mission. You have always been in my mind. There is no question of reviving my interest in you. It was, is and shall ever be. My support and my attention is always the same; never fail to realize this truth . . . I have never forsaken you. I forsake those, who forsake you.

On 31 August 1962, Swamiji wrote:

I have made you one such person upon whom my successors can depend for spiritual guidance and the worldwide propaganda of a greater type of thought and culture . . . I have given you in marriage . . . To take a quick march towards higher potentialities.

In his letter dated 5 September 1962, Swamiji revealed:

Let me whisper the last revelation that first becomes the last and lasting, but then the soul needed a dry cleaning process and a hot water bath. Why not? This is the law, that before entering a temple you will remove your shoes and your hat, because this place is the holiest of the holies.

In his letter of 21 September 1962, Swamiji again wrote:

Marriage is only a milestone upon the noble path, which you are destined to fulfil.

On 3 August 1977, he wrote to tell me to 'live and work for yoga; that's destiny'.

In the 1970s, I continued to correspond with Swamiji from Sydney, Australia, after I had given birth to two children – a turn in my life, which I will return to later.

There is hardly anything else in the world like a guru-disciple relationship, which is absolutely spiritual to the very core; where a guru only thinks of the welfare and spiritual evolution of his disciple and forgives even her million mistakes. Yes, where a guru constantly inspires and sustains the efforts and sadhana of his disciple. In my case, I was a most undeserving recipient of his grace.

As long as I was introverted and maintained my contact with the Divine within me, nothing seemed to upset or disturb me or make me unhappy. I felt immense peace, purity and power within me, but the moment I became extroverted and lost the inner contact with the living presence within me, my mind was influenced by the ups and downs of life. However, deep down within me there was always inner peace.

As Swamiji once said, "I am your mother; I will not mind your mess. Just empty the filth of your mind to me." Indeed, the Guru's compassion and forgiveness are similar to that of God's and the glory of a real guru can hardly be over-emphasized. My heart overflows with devotion and gratitude for my Guru's many gifts of kindness and I remain ashamed of many of my then inadequacies.

Referring to my initial doubts about his divinity, Swamiji wrote on 27 January 1958 even before we had met:

There is no meaning in having faith in the Master only after he has performed certain miracles. What is this funny condition? Real faith and love are independent experiences which you develop even before you know a person. Then why talk about seeing? Will you have less or no faith in God until you have seen Him? Do you say that you will have more faith in God, if He comes face to

face with you? You cannot see Him until and unless your faith is complete.

Listen, you cannot expect me to demonstrate my divinity to your physical senses. You cannot round me up this way. You are free to renounce me, if you fail to induce me to exhibit a tamasha of my divinity in the form of miracles. If you are not fully convinced about your Guru and Govinda, there is absolutely no use in your sadhana.

I am desireless. There is nothing, which I aspire to accomplish here and hereafter. There is nothing, which I miss in life. I need not do anything. It is for the aspirants that I come, move and talk. What do I care whether you accept me as your master or not? Is it of any use to perform miracles just to convince the dull heads of your type, especially when eternal, infinite miracles of the Almighty in the cosmos have not opened your eyes?

How ashamed and utterly miserable I had felt. I had not even personally met Swamiji at that time, but even from a great distance, he knew the doubting state of my mind. I wondered: how does a guru connect himself with the mind of his disciple? One would never know until one has become a guru himself.

Once I made up my mind, to me my Guru became an incarnation of divinity. My relationship with him as a disciple was for this entire life, no matter what happened. I had found him through an inner voice. That was enough for me to rest in his divine fold.

Swamiji cured me a few times when I was very ill. Once when I was in Rikhia, I developed a very severe attack of gastroenteritis. Swamiji sent me a bowl of daal (lentils), and I was instantly well after I drank it. Later, he asked me in front of everyone how I was and I said, "Things are under control, Swamiji." He smiled and grunted softly with his famous nod. I knew he had sent the bowl of daal to cure me of my serious stomach problem. Swamiji had many spiritual powers but he never exhibited them merely to influence people. He did

use them, I believe, for the good of people secretly without letting anyone know.

He helped me several times spiritually when I was in a crisis. I failed on many occasions in maintaining my mind's balance, which in itself is an important sadhana along with the practice of meditation. While, like a strict disciplinarian, he raised the whip of caution and reprimand occasionally, he frequently offered his solace, guidance and help by saying, "Don't repent and don't repeat your mistake." He was very strict and stern when it came to sadhana and one's behaviour. He was as hard as granite, sometimes even generating fear. I was afraid to do anything, which was contrary to his expectations of me or would displease him. Therefore, I was always vigilant, placing myself under the strictest self-scrutiny and inquiry.

He seemed not to have any attachments for his disciples: only great compassion. He had descended on earth to fulfil a mission, which was the revival of yoga and serving God in humanity; and he was extremely passionate and intense about it. He was in a hurry to raise a spiritual army of true helpers of mankind in order to alleviate its sufferings. His heart was full of compassion and he could not bear to see people suffer so much. He gave his best to such disciples in the fond hope of preparing them swiftly for a very great cause, but he was also very quick in removing someone from his grace if he found him or her utterly undeserving and not selfless. He wrote to Ma Dharmashakti on 16 March 1961:

Those who maintain an emotional relationship with me but do not recognize my mission, I set them aside (*unheim main hata deta hoon*).

Swamiji brought out the best in even an ordinary person. Symbolically, if he touched clay it would turn into gold. He would praise a person sky high, but if the disciple was not vigilant and became egoistic, he ran the risk of being dropped from his grace. Swamiji was keen to have for

his mission only the best of men and women, with solid character.

All his relationships were thus woven round his mission's work. Some wondered if in this respect he was ordinarily utterly selfish and even heartless.

Swamiji had experienced the joy of *samadhi*, the highest bliss; and he was firmly established in that state. How could he be judged like an ordinary human being? In one of his letters, Swamiji hints at this when he says:

I have seen the golden bird, the *hamsa* and the *paramahamsa*,
that separates water from milk.

As early as June 1958, he had written to Sushila from Badrikashram, saying that the signs of his mission were becoming clear to him (*Yoga Sadhana Part II*).

Years earlier, when he walked barefoot from one place to another like a mendicant, wearing frayed and mended clothes and was reluctant even to touch money, he wrote to me that his mission would spread all over the world in the future and he needed stalwarts to carry his message to the world.

In his letter of 7 September 1962, Swamiji said:

My work, which is yet in the womb, has great scope, and only people with steady, strong nerves and mind, and a detached character will be able to shoulder it. This, therefore, I say to you, the one whom I look for, for the mission. Only such souls will be taken up for the task, which will be coveted by many in the very near future.

In his letter of 21 September 1962, Swamiji wrote:

You have been earmarked for this purpose. Satyam will not leave you even in the grave.

In my case, the Guru had gone out of his way to encourage his disciple. What had I done to merit such compassion, love

and care? I was totally undeserving of his most generous grace. How did Swamiji know so much about future happenings?

In his letter of 21 June 1956, to Satyabrata, Swamiji said:

Don't postpone this item for old age. There is no guarantee that you will live for one hundred years. If there is a war in 1964? There is no surety of one's life. You cross the road – a motor truck runs over you. I advise you therefore to take spiritual sadhana now itself.

Later, on 31 December 1971, Satyabrata died in a road accident, run over by a bus. Was Swamiji hinting about this tragic event, years before it occurred? He had portents of the events in Lahore during the Partition as well. It was very clear from all these incidents that Swamiji was a highly evolved soul even while he was so young. He got indications about the future. He kept saying that he had come to this world with a purpose. No doubt, Swamiji was a great visionary.

Let us see what he wrote to Dharmashakti on 12 November 1959, about Swami Niranjan's birth much before he was born:

You have changed your direction, your mind. You do not need it, but the country has the need. This child is the demand of this century. You are only a medium, only the carrier of a load. He will belong to society, the country and the world; that child will not be of Satyabrata-Basant. But just as Lord Shankara is the mental child of Brahma, even so, he will be Satyam's. He will be the child Krishna, and you, Yashoda. After his childhood play in Yashoda's lap (Dharmashakti) in Gokul (Nandgaon), the whole world will become his Dwarka (Kshetra).

Understand Dharmashakti, the one whom you are irrigating with your blood, that flower will fill the universe with its fragrance.

In his letter of 6 January 1960 from Mumbai, Swamiji wrote to Dharmashakti again:

The child (Niranjan) is not yours. He belongs to the world. He is being kept with you only for safe custody . . . He will be greater than the great . . . He will be a true human being. Dharmashakti, with the grace of God, the precious diamond that you will get, will help remove the ignorance of so many people.

On hearing the news of Niranjan's birth, Swamiji wrote to Dharmashakti on 21 February 1960:

With great joy I heard the news. He is the descendant of God's light. The Divine Light has manifested to illumine the dark corners with light . . . He is neither your son, nor his. In fact, he is not anyone's son. He has to come to fulfil a particular task . . . He has come as light. He is a precious flower. He will fill the world with his fragrance.

On 11 March 1960, Swamiji wrote to Dharmashakti, "... a part, *ansha*, of God, the Ramakrishna of this century is in your lap."

Again, on 16 March 1960, he said to her, "Remember that Niranjan was my experiment, *prayog*," and on 3 March 1961, he told Dharmashakti, "Niranjan is really Niranjan. He will be the spiritual leader of the world." On 24 May 1961, he reminded her, "You are simply Niranjan's nurse. I am his Providence."

My heart is filled with devotion for Swami Niranjan as I read these letters. My pranams to the Paramahansa, the great Guru, the Yug Purusha and to his successor, the Maha Manav, Alakh Niranjan! May he too like his Guru shower upon me his abundant blessings and grace.

10

Life Takes a Turn – Marriage

My sadhana continued under Swamiji's personal guidance until early 1962, when I married Upen with my Guru's mandate and blessings on 9 February 1962. Ma Yogashakti had emphasized to me the importance of the experience of marriage as necessary in life and had encouraged me to marry. Actually, she played an active part in finally bonding our relationship. Swamiji gave us the date of Basant Panchami. I had not contemplated marriage. In fact, I was vehemently against marrying and had always maintained that I would never marry. I wanted to dedicate my life to the service of humankind and realize my divinity. Swamiji had however advised me against joining any ashram or staking sannyasa and asked me to continue with my sadhana as a householder.

I often wondered whether he thought that a renunciate's life was not suited for me. A young, unmarried girl in our society, especially if she has deep spiritual aspirations, does not have much freedom and support in her parents' home. She has to face several restrictions and objections which one can understand as justifiable because parents feel responsible for their daughter's future. This made me inclined to think about independence and marriage. Could I ever find a life partner who would help me continue with my spiritual practices with freedom and dignity? How and when could such a partner be found? In fact, I did not look for him; at

the right time, he found me during a yoga camp in Mumbai in December 1961. We fell in love with each other while compiling *Satyam Speaks* from *Lessons on Yoga* as we worked together on it in our flat in Sion, Mumbai. I then had intuitively and intensely felt a deep bond with him as if from a previous birth which could not be broken by any adverse circumstance in life. Swamiji and Ma Yogashakti had happily blessed us.

I later wondered, how true it is that close proximity with the opposite sex can suddenly and spontaneously erupt in deep mutual attraction depriving one of rationality and making one lose control over oneself irrespective of age, vairagya or sadhana. There have been just too many such instances in the world of spirituality.

At that point in time, Swamiji had not developed the notion of karma sannyasa, which is now well established by him. Perhaps I was among the very few with whom he began experimenting with the notion of combining family obligations with sadhana. Karma sannyasa signifies being *in* the world but not being *of* the world. For men and women alike, this means that worldly life should not be regarded as an adversary of spiritual life, but rather, that one should combine the two together as best as one can at least until one develops God-consciousness. In a sense, this kind of sannyasa is even more demanding than full renunciation in terms of self-restraint and discipline.

Swamiji had no ashram of his own at that time. I sometimes wondered whether he would have given me sannyasa if he had his own ashram. I had a guru to guide my spiritual life, but I thought that if I naturally came across someone who would join hands with me to work together for the guru's mission and our own spiritual advancement while rendering to each other normal emotional and moral support, the journey of life could be more enduring and pleasant. If one had a compatible life partner, it seemed, there was no harm in being a householder. Indeed, my mind weighed, even gurus in general have a number of

beautiful ashrams, thousands of disciples, enormous amount of money and the best of worldly possessions. No doubt, in return they render valuable service to society and do good work. They also shoulder enormous responsibility for the ethical behaviour of thousands of their disciples who come to their ashrams from all over the world in an endeavour to maintain high reputation for their institutions. Their families thus can be much larger than an individual's family and their responsibilities many times over. So what was wrong in having a little home where one could continue peacefully with one's spiritual practices, content with a few possessions, responding to the bare needs of life? Where one earned one's bread with dignity and the sweat of her brow rather than from donations received from disciples? After all, didn't Swamiji say that it was simply a matter of a change in one's mental attitude and a sense of sincerity?

I later wondered how one who was full of intense vairagya and at one time totally opposed to marriage could suddenly change and think in the opposite direction and offer perfect arguments in its favour? How can the same mind which cherishes noble aspirations suddenly nose-dive to normal human emotions and thinking? Swamiji had once written to me that at some stage of sadhana the mind revolts against the spiritual practices themselves and indulges in thoughts of normal human relationships. Was my mind revolting against years of great austerity and sadhana and cheating me into quest for a better environment? This was, however, a great lesson for me to learn. The mind was never to be trusted and requires constant vigilance because the mind is not divinized until one reaches the stage of samadhi. Or, is this how the destiny works through manipulation of mind – the mayaic power by putting one in certain circumstances? What has to happen, ultimately happens.

As I write this personal conflict and temptation within me with all honesty with a view to caution fellow sadhakas, I am aware that I also run the risk of exposing myself to ridicule and criticism by some readers.

However, after marriage, Upen and I worked together to arrange Swamiji's satsangs in Mumbai in a more organized manner. It was also then that the aims and objectives of the International Yoga Fellowship were drafted and framed by Upen and a motto suggested by Upen was given to the movement:

*Kshudram hridaya daurbalyam tyaktavya, tasmāt yogi bhava
Arjuna.*

Abandon ye this disgraceful feebleness of heart, and
thus become a yogi, Arjuna.

Upen became the first General Secretary of the International Yoga Fellowship. The first issues of the *Yoga* magazine were published during this phase from Rajnandgaon. Upen also wrote down some important aspects for a yoga university, the seeds of which were sown as early as 1962–63. An erudite, scholarly article on *Samadhi* that contained Sanskrit slokas was written by Upen after much research to Swamiji's great surprise because Upen did not then have any schooling in yogic thought. It was published in *Yoga* magazine around 1962–63.

My late father-in-law, Vishnuprasad, lovingly called Kaka by all, was a great Sanskrit scholar and became a devotee of Swamiji. He wrote on various topics like chidakasha dharana; ajapa japa, and so on. He edited *Steps to Yoga* from *Lessons on Yoga Part I*, a book compiling Swamiji's letters to me and Satyabrata and published in 1961. Kaka wrote commentaries on the *Bhagavad Gita* and *Lalita Sahasranam*. He narrated an incident to me while he was writing the commentary on *Lalita Sahasranam*. He was stuck on one stanza; he could not understand the meaning and kept pondering over it for a few days. One night as he was lying down it was as though he heard Swamiji calling him by his name, Kaka, and telling him the meaning. He was amazed, because, of course, that was the right meaning.

My late mother-in-law, Muktaben, too, was a very devout and pious woman. Indeed, I had found a family where I had

the most suitable environment for continuing my spiritual practices, and instead of just me, now there was a whole family including my loving sister-in-law Bharati, devotedly working for the Guru's mission. Marriage, at least at this stage, was not a mistake, I realized.

We held weekly satsangs to celebrate Swamiji's work at our home in Colaba, Mumbai. His most musically talented disciple, Amar Sangeet (as Swamiji named Asha Prasad), often sang bhajans, including those composed by Swamiji, with exquisite piety and in a very melodious voice. The core group, consisting of my family along with Nirmala Gidwani, often affectionately called Nimai (the late Swami Atmananda), Sarla Gehani, Hira Advani, Duru Hiranandani, Mani Umroliya, Radas, Gianchand, late Bal Yogi Deepak and the late Indira Mirchandani, continued to expand. Our small apartment house in Colaba was somehow able to accommodate the growing numbers and we formed a Satyam congregation.

I visited the old Sivananda ashram in Munger a number of times. I remember one such occasion in the mid-sixties when Vijayalakshmi Pandit graced the function there and I was given a formal certificate for the completion of the hatha yoga course. I also recall vividly our visit, soon after marriage, to Munger, Bhagalpur and Chhapra, where Swamiji made me speak in public and we created a lasting bond with many of Swamiji's distinguished devotees. Pre-eminent among these were the late Raibahadur Goenka, lovingly called Babuji and his sons, Krishna Kant and Prabhaji, who hosted Swamiji at Anand Bhavan in Munger, on the banks of the holy Ganga. In fact, we stayed at Anand Bhavan. I also recall with affection, Savitri Sahai at Bhagalpur.

With the establishment in 1963 of the Bihar School of Yoga, a centre for advanced yogic theory and practice, Swamiji became intensely engaged in responding to the manifold demands within and outside India, to create an international network of the International Yoga

Fellowship. Numerous Yoga Teacher Training camps and yoga conferences were held under Swamiji's personal direction and guidance. Satyananda ashrams grew all over the world, led by well-trained eminent disciples who took karma sannyasa to carry out the mission. This is how probably Buddha's disciples must have carried his mission and message of love and compassion all over the world. Many men and women including non-Hindu disciples very bravely shaved their heads and took poorna sannyasa to spread Guru's mission in all the countries in the world. It was a miracle. Such was Swamiji's personal charisma. Swamiji himself travelled ceaselessly throughout India and the five continents, staying for a few days at each place, always moving and hardly resting. He was a man in a hurry possessed by a strong passion to usher in the era of yogic renaissance. I wish, I could have perceived and comprehended this earlier although Swamiji had himself at times told me that his mission will spread all over the world in a very near future and only very brave soldiers will be chosen for this great work. Was Swamiji aware even then of the opposition and difficulties that his disciples would have to face in the worldwide propagation of yoga?

Swami Satsangi, (Swami Satyasangananda), a very charming, capable and dedicated disciple, and Swamiji's right-hand stalwart, often accompanied him on these world tours. At a young age, she gave up everything to join Swamiji's mission and offered her entire life to the Guru's cause. She is at present the Acharya of Paramahansa Alakh Bara in Rikhia. Her contribution to the success of the mission and yogic renaissance has been truly remarkable. She, along with Swami Niranjan, stood firmly by Swamiji's side in all odds of life and perhaps she truly understood that whatever Swamiji did was for a great mission as he was not an ordinary man with average aspirations or emotions. The way the mission spread and survived all over the world was evidence enough that this could only have been God's ordained work to usher in a yogic era.

In 1968, destiny took us away from this country to Sydney, Australia, for a few years where our two beautiful children, a girl, Pratiksha, and a boy, Viplov, were born. Swamiji did not desert us. I remember fondly how he found time to visit us with a few of his disciples during his Sydney sojourn while we were there. He blessed our home in Cremorne, North Sydney, and we took some pictures in the little rock garden behind our house. I continued to have contact for some time with Roma Blair and her colleagues (karma sannyasins in Australia) whom I visited at the Richmond ashram. It was a source of great joy to see Roma Blair expounding the virtues and values of yoga on television to a vastly interested Australian audience, and to see her train and initiate people. Yoga had caught on in the world like wildfire and a tremendous interest in it had erupted.

On our return to India in January 1973, I met Swamiji periodically, whenever I could. No matter how preoccupied he was, I do not recall a single visit of his to Delhi, when he did not bless our home by a visit or we did not go to have his darshan.

I however missed the excitement of events related to the propagation of yoga all over the world from 1968 to 1973, including the rush of hundreds of seekers to Munger because we were away in Sydney and could have very little contact with the ashram. But after returning to India in 1973, we remained in touch. In the meantime, the beautiful building, Ganga Darshan, was built and I visited it a few times while Swamiji was there. I remain grateful to him for the affection with which he received me, and remember to my utter amazement, the delicious rice pulao he had especially arranged for me on one of my visits.

Along with all his desolate followers, we too missed him when he decided in 1988 to renounce the Bihar School of Yoga and International Yoga Fellowship activities at the very height of their global success. The extraordinary story of this great *tyaga*, renunciation, at an advanced age of sixty-five years has yet to be fully told. It is unprecedented in the

spiritual annals of modern India. Perhaps, this is the only occasion exemplifying such tyaga. People generally stick to their posts and enjoy the fruits of their hard work in their old age. Instead, Swamiji nominated Swami Niranjan as his successor and transferred his powers to him. I was privileged to be present in Rikhia along with thousands of other devotees from all over the world on this great and very moving occasion. This once more exhibited Swamiji's greatness and vision. Swami Niranjan was indeed worthy of being his successor and we all rejoiced.

For quite some time, we did not know where Swamiji was, except that he was visiting the holy places of India. Later, at the Paramahansa Alakh Bara, Rikhia, he performed panchagni, the most arduous forms of *dehadaman*, punishing forms of ascetic practices. Later, he was to tell some of us that this was necessary to enable him to liquidate the karmic load he had incurred for about a quarter of a century while undertaking yogic missionary activities around the world and institutionalizing the renaissance of yoga theory and practice in India. He also said that only the one who has conquered kama, krodha, lobha, moha and ahamkara, the five negativities, can successfully perform this panchagni yajna where he sat doing japa wearing a small loin cloth with four fires burning around him and the hot sun at his head in the very hot months of the year.

Upon his return, Swamiji thus, established a permanent retreat in Rikhia. He had not changed. He was still the same no-nonsense, iron man, firm, strict, resolute and completely in command of everything even when some of his close disciples left and betrayed him. And yet, internally, his heart virtually melted with compassion for the poor and underprivileged and even for his disciples who repented and came back to him. He was the greatest feminist I have ever met, putting women on the pedestal of Shakti and constantly working for their welfare and upliftment in a variety of ways.

People from across the world came to this faraway, hallowed place to seek Swamiji's blessings on the rare

occasions he met people. I was most fortunate to meet him on a few such occasions, but he showed rigorous equality towards all his disciples. I did not get a private audience, since he no longer met anyone in private. However, whenever Upen accompanied me, he gave us a lot of his time as he was very fond of Upen and always told people that Upen was one of very few top intellectuals of the world. Swamiji loved to have discussions with him on a number of topics and it was really wonderful to cherish these moments. Upen called him his dearest friend, and indeed, when Upen had heard the news of Sawamiji's Mahasamadhi, for the first time I saw him crying like a baby at his great personal loss.

It is not that Swamiji ever abandoned me or I left him. The question did not at all arise. Mine was a bond of devotion towards him for a whole lifetime no matter where I was. He kept writing to me and guiding me even after my marriage. The words of a true saint never go wrong. As his form-consciousness becomes intense, I feel him intensely within me as my inner Self as if laughing and watching me with unseen alive eyes. However, I still sometimes longed for a repetition of those days when I was his dedicated Vishwaprem, who was attached to him like his shadow, who constantly served him, who could meet him in person as often as she needed to. I had often wished that those old days would return even for a few moments; but the past was the past and those days could never return. Fifty-five years had gone by swiftly. A lifelong mission had concluded. Life indeed is a long dream. Now, even Swamiji is no more in his physical form. What is left is tons of sweet memories of my comparatively brief but intense association with a great enlightened saint and a sidhha yogi, and a sense of unreality over my great fortune being an ordinary girl that I was. One day, any day suddenly I will also be gone, dear readers, now that I am shortly completing seventy-five years of my life, leaving behind with you especially those who have wondered who this Vishwaprem of *Steps to Yoga* is, a

story which will hopefully speak to you. It is for you to find a message in it at an individual level, and I hope so will my wonderful grandchildren, Paripoorna and Sambhav, born to my beautiful son, Viplov and his lovely wife, Shalini; and my daughter Pratiksha, whom Swamiji named Yog, find a community in all of you, my readers.

Swamiji is no more in his physical form but in a sense, Swamiji had reincarnated himself during his own lifetime through Swami Niranjan. Those who had the rare privilege of being close to Swamiji in the 1960s cannot but be struck by the fact that he often presented himself through Swami Niranjan. During our first visit to Rikhia in 1993 after we had visited Munger where Upen was invited to speak during the golden Tyag Ceremony, Swamiji had told us that Swami Niranjan would establish the first International Yoga University in India, a project that was conceived in the early 1960s with the creation of the International Yoga Fellowship.

Later, I had contributed my services as a lawyer and prepared papers for Memorandum of Association, and so on, for submission to the University Grants Commission and rendered whatever services I could in our endeavours to achieve deemed university status for Bihar Yoga Bharati and help fulfil the Guru's great dream. I was happy to serve the mission in any way I could. I do not write this to get any recognition, but as an expression of joy and gratitude that the Guru gave me an opportunity to do something for the mission, while destiny denied me a life of complete dedication to his great cause.

There was great rejoicing in the ashram when Bihar Yoga Bharati was given deemed university status. This was yet another example of the great vision and powerful sankalpa of a saintly soul. What Swamiji had told us years ago had come true.

Thus in a way, I realized Swamiji's mandate to combine domestic life with spiritual pursuits, from the freedom of my own home, between marriage, childbearing and rearing and Swamiji's mission work. I wish that I could truthfully

say that this was merely a question of changing one's attitude, but the daily acts of living, especially as women in Indian society, require a lot more than changes in attitude. The experience of marriage does indeed constitute a rupture in one's sadhana, living with a family in urban spaces with people's social and personal demands that a renunciate never faces.

One may meditate but always amidst a crowd of family members, trying to create a space for oneself. One may seek tranquillity, but that is always to be found within the noise, even cacophony, of this world. Then there is the threat of seduction by worldly pursuits and concerns. The exercise of living as a householder always and constantly threatens your inner spiritual urges. The vigilance against seduction by the pleasures and powers of the world that take you away from sadhana entails an extraordinary degree of spiritual will and commitment. Every day thus is a struggle to combine your duties in the sphere of domesticity with the care of the self and Soul.

I was sure that because I had so many spiritual experiences during meditation and generally in life that the intensity of my yearning for higher knowledge would never diminish and that I would be able to keep up with my sadhana. I believed that the life of a householder provides many opportunities amidst various day-to-day trials whereby one can judge one's mental balance; remove the negativities and impurities from one's mind; mellow down one's ego and learn the lesson of self-surrender to God. Real-life experiences put all this to a very severe test indeed!

I was however sure that there was some purpose in God's plan to implant in my mind the thought of marriage even after I had passed through a phase of such intense vairagya. I did not then understand the full implications of marriage, since from a very tender age until I was twenty-three, I had led a very non-worldly life (no movies, no novels, no friends) and was only concerned with my spiritual practices. Amazing how the mind and destiny work!

My destiny perhaps wanted me to learn certain lessons as a householder: to exhaust my karmas and deep-rooted desires and to pay off certain debts of which I was not even aware, and to further purify my vital consciousness by removing all negativities from my mind. Had I not married then, I would never have married or even been able to take sannyasa as I would have been soon burdened with a huge responsibility. My father, Dr Parsram Jiandani suddenly died of liver cancer in March 1962, just one month after my marriage, leaving a large family behind. My soul was filled with deep anguish and remorse, but I knew that my Guru who had stayed in his house many times would certainly pray for his soul and his desolate family. Indeed he said so, in his letter to my uncle G.T. Harisinghani, praying to God to give strength to my mother Bhoji.

I wondered, if marriage was not for my good, was not my destiny, couldn't the Guru have protected me just for one more month? Did he have an inkling of a great tragedy falling on my family so soon in March that he gave us the date for marriage in February? Strange are the ways of God! Perhaps the Guru did not want to interfere with my destiny; and my destiny was to marry, be a good partner, to comfort and counsel; to study further and become a lawyer; to visit various countries and cities all over the world; to meet important political and academic people; to flower into a better personality, sensitive to human suffering and to develop a sensitive intellect and mind. The finger of destiny moves and we have to follow it. I accompanied Upen wherever he went to various places in Australia, UK, USA, Europe, South East Asia and Africa. I was thus destined to help, serve and morally support a man who would one day become a very learned scholar and in himself a magazine of knowledge, having just one mission to dedicate his life to fight for justice for the most underprivileged people in society, unmindful of any personal or financial considerations and helping thousands of his students and whoever sought his help selflessly never seeking in return

any favour from anyone. One who would freely and most generously share his vast knowledge with others without any fear of them misappropriating his thoughts or ideas. One who would have kindness, generosity and compassion of a high degree for people and thus be truly spiritual in heart if not religious in the ordinary sense of the term. Although on a meager salary of a law teacher, he often would secretly help students who could not pay examination fees, for example, and spend money over social causes requiring me to earn and supplement the family income and eventually become a lawyer. Although this is not my autobiography, yet I think it will not be out of place to write something also about a man with whom I shared fifty-one years of my life. I was again very lucky and, it was due to Guru's grace and benediction upon me that if I could not give my whole life to serve the mission of my Guru, I gave my whole life to serve another great cause which God had ordained for Upen and thus, have no personal ambitions of becoming a great lawyer or a judge apart from wanting an environment to pursue my sadhana quietly.

Yet, I sometimes brooded: is it not well said, that the moment the vairagya becomes intense, one must take sannyasa immediately, otherwise the magic of Maya is such that it quickly once again, envelopes the soul in her fold! Dealing with worldly people as a householder diminishes one's spiritual zeal and affects the precious faith one builds with great effort. Their negativities and atheism sap the energy. I, however, had the protection and grace of my Guru with me, and it enabled me to continue with my practices even though there were periods when I could not do much sadhana. The important thing was to keep moving ahead and to never give up practice, which I never did, although the pace often fluctuated!

I thus worked and meditated with the varying pace of a householder's life. It was a long battle between duty to the family and duty to myself. The life of outer sadhana was over; now I was married and my duty lay with the family

and my sadhana took more of an inner form. I had to put to practice what I had received from my life of sadhana. I had to maintain the inner peace and strength that my meditation gave me in times of crisis and to take all the changing scenes of life as a witnessing self while endeavouring to maintain an inner equipoise and surrendering my life to God's will.

The years from 1954 to 1962, and later from 1973 to 1982 were thus years of intense sadhana filled with various spiritual experiences. I have continued to have some of them, even as I have continued with my sadhana until today. I was lucky to have done some intense sadhana when I was young and to have had the privilege of Swamiji's direct supervision and guidance. This set me rolling along the spiritual road for the rest of my life. Youth is indeed the best time to do sadhana. When the body is young and the nervous system strong, one can withhold the impact of spiritual experiences. The Guru sustained me with great effort and affection during the initial stages of concentration, when one is normally frightened by experiences of jerks, showers of rain, waves, feelings of unconsciousness, heat, aromas, lights, sounds, out-of-body and other experiences some of which happen generally because of muscular reaction or pranic changes (the pranas slow down) and since the mind is new to such experiences. Having been stabilized in those states, it was relatively easier for me to continue with my practices until a time came in 1982, when I was flooded with so many new spiritual experiences, that I desperately needed more guidance. I could not go on alone, as my mind became introverted, dysfunctional and disinterested towards worldly chores.

I had understood that this world is merely a karma bhoomi, a field where we sow new seeds of karmas and reap the harvest of previous sowings, unless we renounce the fruits of actions as Lord Krishna teaches in the *Bhagvad Gita* (2:47):

*Karmanyeva dhikaraste ma phaleshu kadachana;
Ma karmaphalahetur bhoor ma te sango'stvakarmani.*

Your right is to work only, but never with its fruits; let not the fruits of action be your motive nor let your attachment be to inaction.

Happiness and unhappiness in life are the results of my own karmas done in this and previous lives. I should not be puffed up by prosperity or happiness, nor should I lose my head or heart in the adversities of life. I had to learn the art of surrendering to God; whatever happened, happened for my good and I was anyway, responsible for it somewhere along the chain of various lives. It was meant to cleanse my soul and teach me a lesson. With this understanding, I learnt to forgive and let go of things. I also learnt to think positive and be in the present rather than think of the past and future, of what happened and might happen. Forgiveness only gave my mind strength. Feelings of revenge, bitterness and jealousy rob you of your peace. I made two resolutions: I will not consciously hurt anyone's feelings and I will not take away anyone's right. I thus fortified myself with some ethical principles. I honestly found that the emotion of jealousy did not touch me because with my spiritual experiences and the kind of Guru's grace that I have had, I felt, I was richer than the richest people.

I understood that joy and sorrow were two sides of the same coin; that no effort would bring summer when it was winter; that clouds were bound to disperse after some time no matter how dense they were; that adversities only tested our faith and strength; but for adversities, I would not be able to gauge my strength. Therefore, I learnt to try to carry an inner smile when adversities came along, and although on the surface, my mind would sometimes get perturbed but within me deep down I always felt peace.

The difficulties and traumas in life whenever I faced them, made me remember God more and gave a vision to see His protecting hand when you surrender to Him, which gladdened my heart and I always thanked Him. I learnt to see a glass as half-full rather than half-empty and to see what

I had rather than what I did not have. Whenever financial difficulties arose, and they were many, I learnt to think of people who did not have even what I materially had. All this helped to develop mental balance, which in turn helped me in meditation. Indeed, I was the wave and God was the ocean; He was the substratum of my existence and I had no existence of my own without Him. The wave was created by the force of water; only that force had the strength to once again dissolve it in its fold. He alone would give me the experience of my oneness with Him when it pleased Him; I was merely to pray and wait for that experience while sincerely practising my sadhana. Otherwise, why would God have given me so many experiences without my wanting them?

I understood that family members and close friends are souls from different planes who have come together to play the game of give and take. My genuine and real relationship was only with the *antaryamin*, inner being, within me, the Guru being the manifestation of that power. My only soul mate was the divine consciousness present within me, which I often felt, and the real fulfilment and contentment of a relationship happened when our mind was connected with it. No other relationship with any man or woman brought the kind of oneness that we all long for. Meditation made me fall in love with myself, my higher consciousness, and I was enormously happy at times: a pleasant tickling force that awakened in me, the feeling of someone's teasing, laughing or smiling presence within me; a mild intoxication that the repetition of the divine name often brought; the exhilarating experience of being alive without the physical body, a thoughtless and serene state of mind that dawned upon me; all this was so wonderful that the external negativities could not cancel the inner peace of mind which was always there. It seemed that peace and happiness were inherent qualities of my consciousness and were entirely independent from outside factors.

Yes, I am alive and conscious and I could only be part of a larger life and consciousness even as matter can only be part of matter; gas belongs to gas; water belongs to water;

air belongs to air; one belongs to the same category. So, how could I, life, energy and consciousness, be or belong to this body, to this matter, to that which will only become dust and bones one day? No, I was a manifestation of Satyam, Shivam and Sundaram!

Although I had yearned intensely for sannyasa when I was just twenty years old, destiny put me into a marriage. I lived two lives: the extroverted and the introverted. The outer life had to be worldly in conformity with the social requirements of the life I led, but the inner life always remained hidden as a spiritual life. My destiny had carved out a path for me; that of sadhana, service and suffering, and it was through this threefold path that I was to complete the process of self-purification.

I suffered much humiliation and rejection for my spiritual aspirations, in general, in this selfish world. People always look at you in terms of your worldly success, degrees, status, money and looks. When I became a lawyer, I seemed instantly to find a new place in society. One has to be very strong to choose a spiritual life and stick to it, especially when one has to live in a worldly environment. I stuck to my spiritual aspirations. I knew that marriage was only a milestone along the path of my life. I had to go beyond, towards the realization of my lofty spiritual ideals no matter how long it took. I was simply following the dictates of destiny. I was serving divinity in my partner even as I would have served divinity in my Guru. And thus, uprooted from my spiritual soil and thrown into a ruthless and arrogant intellectual academic world skeptic of every spiritual aspiration, I learnt to be tough and to survive.

Alas, in this perpetual struggle, a major part of life slipped by. One more life was not adequately used for the great goal; one more repetition of an age-old mistake and an eternal regret. Perhaps, marriage is not conducive to higher practices of sadhana.

I understood that worldly and spiritual lives are two different things. It is very difficult for worldly people who

lead mechanical lives without any contemplation of higher things of life or thought of sudden death or serious illness befalling them, to understand spiritual experience. It is not their fault. It is only a matter of spiritual evolution. People respond and act according to their sattvic, rajasic or tamasic natures.

I thus kept up with my practice of meditation, japa, prayers, contemplation, study of the scriptures, and so on. I could falter and make a million mistakes. I could pause briefly, but like a lily I had to glide forward, slowly but steadily, never forgetting the aim of my life: the realization of my divinity; the discovery of my roots. Yes, my eternal quest of 'Who am I?' A lifelong battle and a lifelong aspiration and remembrance of my Guru, my God and my mantra that had taken hold of my psyche.

From now on, wherever and however I was to live, I would get guidance from the inner guru in my meditation, in my visions. Sometimes in my dreams I was receiving his blessings, hearing him talk, touching his feet while performing my pranams, or getting gifts of fruits and other things from him. This was how I was to remain in constant contact with my Guru and my inner life survived and found strength.

I, however, met my Guru whenever I could and was grateful for whatever I received. I sent him my sadhana reports and apprised him of my progress in meditation until he left the Munger ashram for a life of a Paramahansa. When he settled in Rikhia, I went to have his darshan whenever I could. He gave me his blessings by way of books, gifts and *upadesha*, instructions. Whenever I was in great grief he would put his consoling hand on my head and I would experience instant peace. He let me stay in the Alakh Bara; he made me sit along with his close sannyasi disciples apart from the general public, and he would inquire about our general welfare. So compassionate and great is the Guru that he knows everyone has her own destiny, and it is better for her evolution to observe her own dharma and to do her own

duty. When I had asked Swami Niranjan for initiation into karma sannyasa on Maha Sivaratri day in 2003, when I was in Rikhia, Swamiji very generously had consented to it and I had shed streams of tears! I had at last joined the army of his soldiers.

I was to remain content and patient continuing basic spiritual practices, which did not take me away from the activities of routine life, a life of a middle-class woman's domestic responsibilities and duties along with the career of a lawyer, a cross that most professional women have to bear.

I had to give up my dependence on the outer Guru in order to manifest the inner one. This was the only way higher knowledge would be revealed to me, no matter how long it took. My soul had to go through the fire of further purification. I had to wait patiently till the inner purgation was complete; till worldly desires and samskaras were greatly removed from my psyche. I longed once again for that bliss of meditation and true happiness which I had glimpsed through my Guru's grace. I had to pray and then wait for the divine grace in utter surrender and humility.

The lifelong struggle and sadhana have culminated in feelings of inner peace and contentment, which are so beautiful. What else does one need? Indeed, Divinity manifests within in different forms and peace is one form of divine manifestation. No more visions, lights and experiences, no more psychic gifts; only inner form-consciousness, feeling of a presence, peace and total quietness.

11

Tirtha Sthal: Sivananda Ashram, 1962

Having the darshan of the Guru's Guru is the dream of every disciple. Why, may one ask is one animated by a desire to be a part of the *gurukul*, the spiritual community of *siddhas*, the attained ones, and the *sadhakas*, the seekers? Or is it the longing for a glimpse of the *Mahaguru*, the Great Guru? Or indeed is it just another way of realizing one's own self in the great mirror of spiritual vision, embodied by a community of realized beings, who have scaled the pinnacles of meditation and attained moksha?

I do not know the answer to these and related questions, but it was certainly, I believe, not idle curiosity that led me to Sivananda Ashram in Rishikesh in early March 1962. I was responding to a deeper urge: to be where Swamiji had lived and worked, meditated and attained realization. It was a place of pilgrimage for me, a *tirtha sthal*. I had in a sense already been there because Swamiji had taken me there through his letters and his frequent invocation of Guru Maharaj Swami Sivananda's teachings. Yet, I wanted to be there with my senses: I wanted to breathe the same air, walk along the same hilly roads, touch the very same machines and articles in the printing press where Swamiji had worked so long and so hard for the publications of the Divine Life Society, to go to the kutir where he prayed and meditated, and to touch the feet of his Guru and gurubhais. Above all, I wanted to seek the blessings of the Paramguru, and

somehow through his blessings acquire recognition as a part, however infinitesimal, of his divine mission carried forward by Swamiji.

I was naturally very excited about meeting Swami Sivananda. Yet, I was besieged by a series of anxieties: Would I be given the privilege of meeting with him even for a short time? Would he, always visited by the world of worshippers, have a special way of communicating his blessings to me? Why did I wish so much to be owned thus? Would he think I was too presumptuous? Would he absolve me of all my longings and belongings with a single beatific gaze – my *ahamkara*, ego, and *adhi-kara*, sense of entitlement?

Several of my anxieties and forebodings lifted when upon arrival we were directed to a sannyasi called Swami Atmananda who welcomed us with overwhelming affection and gave us his kutir for the duration of our stay. He was responsible for the facilitation of the ashram's special guests, those associated directly with Swamiji Maharaj's disciples. Swami Chidanandaji, a close gurubhai of Swami Satyananda and later the President of the Divine Life Society, had directed this special care for us. Swami Atmananda, a cheerful soul who talked constantly, told us how pleased he was with the assignment. It also turned out that he had in his poorvashram life been associated with Kaka, my father-in-law, as his assistant! What a conjunction of worldly and spiritual *sanjog*, circumstances, mark the rhythms of our worldly and spiritual life! He did not directly know Swamiji, but was happy to reminisce about him as a foundational personality in the evolution of the Sivananda Mission. His conversations with us were already a form of blessings: I had a profound sense of feeling welcomed.

I began to sense that the ashram was my home, not a home away from home, but the home of all of us, the abode of the universal spirit of love, affection and quest; a home for our own spirituality that we so readily render orphan and destitute. In my first day at the Sivananda Ashram, I realized why spiritual quest renders every ashram as a home and

every home as an ashram. I took the very first steps here in learning the meaning of the holy.

It was the holy that I communed with at the general satsang when I glimpsed the great presence of the revered saint. Here was the guru of gurus, with a beatific smile and generous presence, amidst a handful of devotees, in the open space enhanced by the glimpse of Mother Ganga, the foothills and the wide blue sky. Seated on a large chair, draped in a long coat, unperturbed by an ageing body that housed the eternal spirit, a body that resisted age with a whole crowd of pains, aches and cramps that slow down agility and alacrity; here at last was that vision that moved the whole world to new directions. Energy and luminosity marked this presence. One was possessed of a sense of great illumination and profound renewal just sitting by his side and receiving his divine gaze. His radiant eyes illumined whatever they saw. I felt him looking at me, with a hint of a gracious smile, that manifestation of his benign humour, and I knew at once that I was blessed. I felt the spark of the divine within me. It was more than a sensation; it was a gift, a lifelong gift, and a life beyond life, endowment. I knew somehow that this benediction meant that I belonged to the great gurukul.

How did I feel when I saw him for the first time? I had waited with great eagerness to meet with him for so many years. When I met him I wondered why he looked so familiar, but yes, of course, I had seen his picture in that little office I had once worked in. Even today I can feel his brilliant eyes looking at me.

The satsang began with *Sivananda Stuti*, *Bol bol Sivananda*, an invocation of the Guru that is God and God that is Guru. I had heard and chanted this before, but to recite it in his presence was a supreme privilege, a complete metamorphosis of spirit and vocation. I felt as if I was in a deep trance.

I do not recall wholly, what followed in the question and answer session. I only recall Swamiji's voice, a resonant,

powerful voice that enabled me to glimpse God, where the nada assumed the form of the Brahman. I could not open my eyes; that would have been a form of sacrilege because what was to be seen was now only possible through the *atma chakshu*, sight through the soul, and not through physical sight, *charma chakshu*. A gentle nudge from Swami Atmananda provided the earthly reminder that the satsang was over. I saw the bewilderment on his face when I asked him, “How can it ever be said to be over?”

In the evening was the arati which continued that mystic communion. The arati is an extraordinary occasion. I do not now clearly recall the *murti*, the image, to whom the worship was dedicated, nor the surrounding and the imposing marble arch and floor. All I remember is the oceanic melody of the eternal chant recalling all that is holy beyond this world and summoning us to bringing it into this world.

The next morning we visited Swami Chidanandaji. It was a great joy to meet him. He was gentle, radiant, smiling and compassionate. There was an aura of divinity around him. We were at once attracted to him for his humility and affection. He received us in his kutir which he and Swami Satyananda had shared for a while. He then guided us to Swamiji’s kutir. It was a very steep walk, and I must confess that even at the young age of twenty-three, I found myself quickly out of breath. Swamiji had walked along this road thousands of times carrying heavy loads during the twelve-year period when he had served his Guru with great devotion and dedication. He must have had incredible stamina.

I was privileged to spend a few brief moments in Swamiji’s former kutir: a most extraordinary privilege indeed. The kutir was bare and Spartan. Yet, for me it was full of riches that this world can never describe. Here was the seat, the source and the space for liberation and realization. It was indeed a holy and hallowed ground. I wept uncontrollable tears of joy and then went still. The deepest and profoundest moments of my spiritual journey consist in the recovery of that space.

The next morning I was privileged to get a brief audience with Swamiji Maharaj. My joy was beyond bounds. I had longed to meet him since 1954 when I had written my first letter to him at the age of sixteen, when I had said that I had everything in my life, but was still pining for something, I knew not what. He blessed me with his beatific gaze. He asked me to rise from his feet and he put his hand over my head. He said, "Pursue your sadhana, always. Experience the divine, within and beyond you."

I had thought that at that moment I would ask him several things, all the metaphysical questions that had haunted me all these years. I wanted to ask him what I should do in my life and how I could contribute to the future of the mission in small ways. He knew my unasked questions and answered them through his divine gaze, smile, touch and words. Suddenly, in his presence all my doubts and queries disappeared. My mind went blank. I had no questions. Somehow, I knew that I was blessed. I was received into the gurukul and the rest of my spiritual journey had now begun in earnest.

Since then in my karmic life, I know that I have often slowed down in my efforts, but the path opened up by that benediction was never closed.

My encounter with the Paramguru was brief but poignant. I was unaware then that he would give up his mortal body shortly thereafter. He took samadhi in 1963. My dream to be with him and learn from him remained unfulfilled.

I had to curtail my trip and rush back to Bombay where my father was dying of cancer. After a terrifying struggle with life, he died in March 1962 on the day of the Holi festival. I was with him during his last days serving him and looking after him. A large family had become orphaned. My uncle G.T. Harisinghani received a letter of condolence from Swamiji. In his letter dated 31 March 1962, he wrote to him saying, "A great tragedy has fallen upon Vishwaprem's family. May God give them strength. Life is a never-ending

struggle. There is no corner without problems. Everyone is panicky. One follows a clue only to face another clue and that is followed by endless clues.”

Life had to go on. Swamiji’s plan was to visit Mumbai in May that year for four weeks and conduct classes for small groups in the various suburbs of Mumbai. We all got busy with the arrangements. There was a noble mission to think about. There was no time for private grief.



12

Spiritual Experiences

When one first starts meditation, gradually with some practice, the mental waves or thoughts or *vrittis*, start getting collected. I used to experience myself as if in the midst of an ocean, with waves circling around me – waves and more waves.

Sometimes, I felt as if I was growing huge, like a mountain. At times, I felt I was going far away from myself. At other times, I would feel rain showers. Sometimes I would get jerks. At still other times I would see different lights – blue, red, and so on, within my forehead. I would get startled with these experiences of lights, sounds, aromas, deep waves, rain showers, moving away from myself, feelings of coolness or heat, lightness, pleasantness, force, jerks, zooming unconsciousness. Encouragement and guidance from the Guru helped me to pass through this stage.

Responding to my initial spiritual experiences during the first three years of my sadhana since 1955, Swamiji wrote to me on 1 January 1958, even before we met in October 1958:

Please remember that you need not try to observe how you feel during sadhana. There should be nothing left in the mind except name and form. Physical sensations, coolness, feeling of lightness, and so on, are such feelings that they take the mental consciousness away from the goal. Even if you see a light, hear a sound, experience rain showers, sense jerks, or feel like becoming unconscious you should be

Careful that you don't drift away from name and form. These signs are just indications of a growing one-pointedness in the mind. They reveal to the sadhaka that he should be still more aware of name and form. Those yogic experiences, which you have enumerated, are the signs of growing mental poise in you. You need not attempt to recollect those experiences.

In his letter of 24 March 1959, Swamiji wrote:

These visions that you have described in your letter are signs of mental unification to a great extent. They do come up to a particular stage of sadhana. However, they shouldn't allure the sadhaka and deviate him from his path of *ishta roopa*, or form, sadhana.

Lights and visions are inner symptoms of the consummation of mental vrittis. They indicate that your various mental waves are merging in the ocean of your chosen form.

You needn't analyze the philosophy of lights. Even as a traveller leaves the last milestone to reach the next one, likewise past experiences should not be recollected. There is only one thing which is the main object of your concern – that is the manifestation of form during deep meditation when the witness of meditation and the meditator have embraced each other.

Try to forget yourself completely by maintaining a secular attitude towards visions, lights and psychic sensations. By and by, the visions will slow down and the consciousness of form alone will reign supreme. Ultimately, the subject and object too will merge in one.

Cautioning me to maintain my mind's balance in all situations of life, Swamiji wrote to me on 17 April 1960:

Your soul is taking flight. Let nothing interfere with its speed. Even a little of ashanti will completely undo the great achievements you have made so far.

In his letter of 1 September 1960, Swamiji explained:

That voice, which you heard during concentration, was a faint expression of your inner voice. That would get clearer as and when you make progress.

Yes, your motor is now in speed. Fear not. You have to realize. Nothing can harm you even a bit. Charge your mind with faith and confidence. Please be aware of the power which is evolving in you day by day and which has begun to work through you. Now most things are being done by that power.

Explaining he said, “The force, which was sleeping in you, is waking up. It is gradually possessing your being. Ultimately, it will possess you in full to the extent that you will not even remember about yourself. Guru is always blessing you. He is eager to see you enlightened. I am glad that you have so intelligently followed the preliminaries and higher courses of yoga. What remains now is realization.”

On 7 August 1959, Swamiji wrote:

So I have given you a few glimpses of that ananda which is born of dhyana, and which you asked for.

I was overjoyed. I knew now that the experiences I received during meditation were gifts from the Guru. My efforts were only symbolic – obeying his instructions. When I felt tired and discouraged, Swamiji wrote to me in his letter dated 25 December 1959:

Don't you feel that this bit of progress you have so far made, takes years and years for many others to achieve? You may not realize, but I know it too well. There are those sadhakas also, who have been struggling for years together, achieving not even that much success.

In his letter dated 31 December 1959, Swamiji wrote to me:

Yes you are progressing. You are heading towards balance. You are becoming 'clear-minded'. Your divine force is rejoicing because you have cleared its path of pilgrimage to a very great extent. Be calm; don't at all attempt at exercising your atma shakti.

I give above extracts from Swamiji's letters merely to show how Swamiji sustained my efforts with great affection, patience and care through this initial period of practice of concentration. But for his encouragement, I would not have been able to continue my practice. These instructions and guidance helped me to overcome the fear of the unknown and the unfamiliar and move ahead on the difficult path of meditation. It was because of my complete trust in the Guru that I obeyed him blindly. I had faith that nothing he did would harm me in any way whatsoever, and sure enough, I was the one who benefited.

For the benefit of readers, I give below some of the spiritual experiences I had in meditation during the long period of my sadhana while leaving aside more personal and intense experiences. Normally, one's spiritual experiences are very personal, but now a great worldwide wave of yogic interest has emerged. There is considerable literature available not only on spiritual experiences, but also on the actual awakening of kundalini by those who had the good fortune to have that experience. Thousands of people all over the world are practising yoga. We will soon see an entire new generation of illumined souls. My spiritual experiences are not significant by any standard, but they could encourage the sadhakas to continue with their meditation and not give up or practise in fear, in which case I would have kept my promise to my Guru to motivate other seekers on this divine path.

Sometimes my body became very light. There were pleasant sensations throughout the body and a sense of purity prevailed upon me. I felt as if there was a large room inside me and a big air-cooler was cooling my entire being. I felt an inner

smile, as if someone inside me was smiling or laughing. There would be a pleasant tickling life-force in my legs which would constantly distract my mind and sometimes get very intense. It was difficult to cope. I understood that it was the force of prana which awakens with sadhana. Sometimes, I wanted to cry or compose poetry, or sing and dance. The meditative poetry in this book was written during such moods of spontaneous expression. At times, I felt that I was going inside, within me instantly, and the meditation mood would come by itself. I felt as if I was tied down by a rope in meditation posture and I could not move. There would be a feeling of mild intoxication in the repetition of the divine name.

Several times, during meditation, I heard someone speaking in a loud voice within me, but I did not try to remember or write the words. I was then too young to understand their significance and there were so many experiences.

Once I saw beautiful flowers, the likes of which I had not seen in this world. Did I have a vision of another plane of consciousness where these flowers bloomed? Is it then true that there are other subtler planes of consciousness where things are sharper and more real than the things of this world which are mere shadows of them? Was it then possible that what is here in this world is also elsewhere, perhaps in a different form, shape, colour or density?

While in meditation, I sometimes got the aroma of beautiful incense even when there was no incense outside. Occasionally, I saw deep, rich, blue skies and vast spaces I had not seen in this world. The experiences of sight, touch, smell were much sharper and more intense in meditation.

One day, I smelt a dead rat in our house, but there was no such thing there. A little later, I got a phone call from the office asking me to send a cleaner, since there was a dead rat there. Amazing! How could I have smelt a dead rat which was so far away from me?

Once after evening meditation in shavasana the meditation form cleared. Suddenly I saw a brown envelope with the

feeling that it was coming to me by mail. It was so clear and intense. I received a brown envelope of the same description in the mail the next morning.

Often, someone gently woke me up in the mornings. At about 5 am, one day I woke up suddenly with every cell in my brain lighting up like an electric bulb and my right arm fully electrified. In my sleep, a strong hand clasped my hand and that gave me a sharp electric shock, which brought me into complete wakefulness. I felt my hand heavy under the shock.

One night, Upen had a terrible pain in his left knee. I put my right hand on it, prayed unto God to heal him and while doing japa fell asleep with my hand still on his knee. In the morning he said that my hand gave out tremendous heat and his pain disappeared after a few minutes. Similarly, sometimes our children when they were very young would instantly find relief from pain in the throat or stomach after my touch.

On one of my trips to Tirupati temple, as I looked at the idol of Lord Venkateshwara, suddenly a crown lit up on the right side of the idol. I discovered later that a picture of goddess Padmavati wearing a crown was on the right side of the idol. I was delighted to see the light.

At another time, I visited a temple in Rajkot. As the morning arati was performed, I saw a sword on the idol of Goddess Durga suddenly light up. I pinched myself to see if the experience was real and it was; the light continued to glow for a while.

On one occasion while I was in Delhi, I was very ill with a high fever. Swami Atmananda, my dear childhood friend, suddenly visited me. She said in sympathy while leaving, "Get well soon." After she left, I actually saw with my open eyes, two rows of virus exiting my body and moving far away from me. I was instantly well. The fever disappeared. How could I actually see something minute like virus with my open eyes? I was totally unaware of myself at that point of time. Swami Atmananda was a very evolved soul and she had dedicated her whole life for her Guru's mission.

On another occasion, I woke up in the middle of the night hearing my Guru mantra being chanted loudly within me. I heard it for a while even after I awakened. This was the mantra that Swamiji had sent me in my sleep when he was in Badrinath in June 1958 and about which he had written to his disciple Sushila (*Yoga Sadhana Part II*). I was wonder-struck.

I was standing near a mobile food vendor wanting to buy some fruit for lunch one afternoon. Suddenly, I felt an inner spring within me, and sensations of sheer joy and peace sprang through me like a real water spring does. It was an experience of sublime happiness that one does not get from anything in this world. This is the inner happiness that one experiences independent of anything else, even if you are in rags. Such an enormous store of happiness is within us and yet we are so miserable.

One day, I was in a taxi and when I extended my hand to pay the fare, I heard a voice within me saying, “Look there, look there.” Fascinated by the voice, I turned to look in front of me and saw a picture of Baba Nityananda of Vajreshwari hanging in the taxi, as many drivers in India hang pictures of enlightened souls. It suddenly became very vivid and almost alive. His hands were raised in a mudra. I could not be sure what he was conveying with those hands. I had been very depressed for some time. Perhaps, he was blessing me and asking me to remain spiritually uplifted.

Swamiji had taken me to have the darshan of Baba Nityananda in Vajreshwari when he came to visit Mumbai around 1958 or ‘59. My mother Bhoji and Swami Atmananda, then very young, were also with us. Baba was a self-realized saint. He asked me what I wanted and I folded my hands and said, “Success in meditation.” Baba looked at me very pleased, his shining bright eyes had lit up and he raised his hand in blessings. I had great shraddha for him. I still very vividly remember that meeting. My mother said she saw Swami Satyananda in him when she offered her pranams because she aspired for that experience. It was Swami Nityananda who had

asked Swamiji to start an ashram and when Swamiji had asked from where the money will come, he had said, “Money comes and goes the way it came.”

Later around 1982, in Surat, South Gujarat, I met Baba Muktananda during his satsang there. I was standing at a distance and he motioned me to come closer. He said, “Never give up your sadhana; the light you see in meditation is the light of God; it will get clearer.” I had felt so much peace in his presence. This indeed is a test of a true saint. Soon afterwards, Baba took mahasamadhi and I felt very sad that I could not go to his ashram in Vajreshwari and spend some time there. Meeting true saints is a rare fortune and to be able to serve them is even rarer. I have always felt the pain of not being able to personally serve my Guru after marriage, due to circumstances that demanded my presence elsewhere.

I was thus very lucky to have had the blessings of such self-realized saints as Swami Sivananda, Swami Nityananda, Swami Muktananda, Swami Satchidananda in Virginia, USA, who had asked me to change my lifestyle and diet if I wanted to revive my experiences and Mai Amritananda who hugged me in Munich, Germany, and said, “My daughter has come again.” I had met her earlier in Delhi once. She would give a tight hug and then suddenly let go as if releasing energy. In the presence of all these great saints, one thing was common and that was that I felt instant peace. In the presence of Swami Niranjana, I had felt a flow of great energy and I was as happy being with him as I was with Swamiji. Yet as Swamiji had once written to me, “You will not get illumination even if you meet a thousand saints,” one has to do continuous, rigorous and honest sadhana and there is no other easy alternative.

Standing at a bus stop one evening, I suddenly heard a voice saying twice, “Your purse has been stolen.” Amazed, when I looked into my handbag, the small money purse was not there. Someone had stolen it in the office when I was not in my room. Who was it within me, who cautioned me, consoled me and guided me periodically? Why? Why did I

deserve it? I had not even done enough penance or sadhana. I did not know how to activate this silent prompting voice, but it would come of its own accord. It was like receiving a phone call from someone, but not having the number to dial the person.

Once another similar experience happened when I and Upen were at an airport and I wanted to go to the washroom. As I got into the lift, I heard a voice inside me saying. "Go back, or you will lose Upen." Immediately by the same lift, I came down and started looking frantically for Upen who was nowhere to be seen. I ultimately met him when I made an announcement for him minutes before boarding the plane was to close. Strange, how this inner prompting was always correct and this is one thing it has been hard to live without. When I asked about this from one lady saint, she said that God Himself gave such promptings and spoke from within. How could I be so lucky, I wondered.

Occasionally, when I slept soundly, I snored a little. Even in deep sleep, I would be awake and aware that I was snoring. I would virtually hear myself snoring. What is that conscious principle within us that is awake even when we are sleeping and witnesses even sleep? It is as if there is another being within me, a man within a man, a being within a being. There seems to be an independent consciousness within us that can experience things on its own and does not need the medium of the senses. How intensely I had begun to feel this higher consciousness within me!

One day, as I was looking at Swamiji in Rikhia, I suddenly lost myself. I saw his left eye as if an empty hole and a ball of light was shining behind it. I saw it with my open eyes in an altered state of consciousness. When I asked Swami Chidananda about it, he said that I was given a vision of the evolutionary light within Swamiji. This experience indicated that if waking consciousness altered for any reason, one could see things that one cannot see ordinarily. Nay, one can even momentarily command nature. What actually happens to the brain waves? The strange thing is that one cannot

get these experiences if one wants them; they just come. I could not alter my state of consciousness while awake even if I wanted to. It just happened. I wondered how easily one drops into an altered state of consciousness in dream and sleep states. Why does it take so much effort in the waking state? Could one influence the brain waves by any method to bring about an alert introverted state – something different from hypnosis?

I was meditating one day, sitting very close to the picture of meditation and an electric bulb was fixed over it for better light. As my concentration grew deeper, I felt as if I was going to burn unless I opened my eyes. As I opened my eyes, with great difficulty, the bulb fell out of its holder and dropped into my lap. Later, I was told by Swami Niranjan that the pranic force works anti-clockwise. Was it the sheer proximity of the pranic force to the bulb that turned it and loosened it? Is this how mental or pranic force works like a physical force? I could not withstand the experience of burning out of fear because my subconscious mind knew that I was wearing synthetic clothes and I forced myself to open my eyes. Strange, how everything gets filtered into the subconscious mind even without our knowledge. There was of course nothing outside. This was an inner experience. I failed to transcend this experience and gave in out of fear. Was it a test of courage in which I failed miserably? I wondered. Perhaps, my repeated contemplation that I was a soul and not this body and nothing could ever harm me, was not deep enough.

I was sleeping one night and suddenly woke in to a semiconscious state, feeling huge waves of energy rise within me. With it there was a strange aliveness of energy in the sexual region. My God, this stupendous energy, like the force of furious nature, lies locked in mooladhara chakra at the base of our spine. What havoc can happen if it is suddenly released without Guru's control and supervision?

During meditation, I frequently experienced what is known as an out-of-body experience. I would feel as if I had

suddenly moved out of my body and would shoot out like an arrow or a rocket with great speed. I would know that my mind was going in and withdrawing, as if I was neither out nor in, but on the threshold of awareness. I would not, however, be aware of the moment when I moved out. I would return suddenly with a thud or a click and I would be conscious of coming back to myself.

There were times when I was sleeping and a strange thing would happen; I would wake up inside and would not be aware of my body or the room. It was a mental 'I' that would suddenly become conscious and aware in sleep. I saw something, a conscious entity capable of shaking the Himalayas move at a great speed. I use the word 'see' because when the feeling of an objective experience becomes very intense, one can almost see it. It came and stood near my face. It looked like a human being as if space itself had eyes and life. When once I asked Swami Niranjana about this, he had said that this is the description of *hiranyagarbha*. I wondered with awe how much knowledge and experience Swami Niranjana had! It was a presence with an unseen face. It had no eyes and yet appeared to look at me with piercing eyes. It could read my mind and thoughts. It was aware that I was frightened. For the first time, I learned that thought itself is a universal language and if one knows how to read thoughts, one need not know any language. It was almost like two lovers, on our mundane plane, looking into each other's eyes and knowing or reading 'desire' in their hearts; or, two enemies reading hatred in each other's eyes. Perhaps someday, one would be able to convert thought vibrations into a linguistic pattern and thoughts would be read as language. Or, does this fall only within the domain of a conscious human being?

I was very afraid, but I said to myself that I had my Guru and I was protected, and this presence could not harm me. This shows that whatever we know in our conscious mind is registered in our subconscious, where we think in the same way although we have no rational control over it. The

moment I thought this, the presence appeared to understand that it was now welcome and it entered me virtually from the pores of my skin. I don't know how. I woke up. Oh, dear me! I had the experience of a living and thinking presence without a body. Was it my own subtle body, which had left me during sleep, and was now returning to me? Was this power with terrific speed the power of my own soul? Or was it my alter ego, the second Being within me? If so, who was this living force? Someone else within me? Who was this someone else? I was aware that I was aware of a living presence. There were two conscious entities. I, who saw the subtle living presence, and the living presence itself, and what about my waking 'I' who remembered the event? I could not understand. I was quite scared and bewildered for days together.

The other time I was similarly awakened inside by some strange power within me, and I saw myself climbing a ladder with rungs that were farther apart than normal. My head was bowed down as if I was told not to look up. I was afraid that if I moved my head, I would fall down. I climbed with great attention to prevent myself from falling. Swamiji, in his subtle form, was gliding up alongside me by my side; he was as in real life wearing geru clothes. This experience was very real, almost a vision of another plane of consciousness. Up I moved as if I had climbed thousands of miles and felt very tired. The moment I was seized by the fear that I was going to fall down, Swamiji turned back and as if with magnetic arms pulled me up. I felt I had reached the first peak. Gradually, we continued climbing and I felt we had reached the second peak. I often wondered why there was this notion of a ladder and a peak and thousands of miles and getting tired. Was this a psychic ladder that joined earth and terrestrial regions? After a while, Swamiji asked me to look around. I very gently raised my head for the first time and lo and behold, I saw a most beautiful blue sky. I have never seen such a brilliant blue colour in this world, and also lovely sparkling fresh water, a pond perhaps. I once again



My wedding, 1962



Sita and family



Our children Viplav and Pratiksha, 1970s



My in-laws V.V. Baxi and Muktaben



My mother



With Sri Swamiji in Rikhia



With Ammaji



Vishwaprem and Upendra with Swami Niranjana



At Sri Swamiji's Mahasamdhi stal in Rikhia

wondered later, 'Are colours, fragrances and flowers sharper and more beautiful at another plane of consciousness? Is this world really pale before the beauty of other planes? What was it that I saw? Was it chidakasha? Was it the mental space where other finer worlds are, where one goes after death to pause until one is born again on this earth?' There was no one to tell me and guide me.

Had the inner guru been activated inside and was he leading me on? I now realized the significance of blindly obeying a real guru in this life, because if you don't obey him here, your consciousness will never obey him in a different plane, when he guides you and gives you a command at that plane. You are in the vast space as a living mental being with some type of subtle body, which resembles your physical body, moving to and fro alone and your only lead, if you are lucky, is sound or light or the inner guru. I also learnt from this experience that the real guru is within us as our own pure consciousness. At some stage the inner guru is activated, and perhaps from there, the stage of making an effort is over; he takes over and personally guides you. What is this space into which one is automatically pushed and by whom? How is it different from geographical space or dream space? What are these different spaces – the space of this earth, the space of dreams which we experience where everything appears real, and this limitless space in which a yogi moves with full awareness?

When we reached the second peak, I was very tired and felt that I could not proceed further. Suddenly I asked the inner guru, "You said, you will show me God; where is he?" As I said this, it was as if my soul was merged with his and two became one. I fell at his feet in utter devotion and wonder. He said, "I am pleased with your surrender."

What was all this – an experience of another plane? It was absolutely real. How fantastic! At some stage, the guru and the disciple cannot only actually converse with each other but also feel the touch. The inner guru perhaps showed me that the guru, disciple and God are in fact one. With this I

woke up with a click; I was wide awake. My brain felt very light and empty, but there was some pressure on my heart. I was enormously happy and dazed, but stupidly, later on fear gripped my mind. I started thinking negatively about the risks of such crazy experiences. I was too scared to go on like this without proper guidance. I fell very ill with high fever for days together. Spiritual experiences seemed to affect the body.

The doctors could not diagnose what was wrong with me and loaded me with medicines. After a while, I recovered. Everything was in turmoil. My children were very young and my mind would not function properly due to intoxication of introversion. The brain would switch off. I was as if addicted to meditation. I was losing my grip on life. I was always slipping into meditation. Although I performed all my duties as best as I could it was not enough. Family demanded my complete attention so that it did not feel insecure. Alas, I myself needed support, but who would understand my predicament? The freedom to do sadhana for which, at least I thought, I had primarily married, had become a shackle in the higher spiritual path, but it is not always easy to take poorna sannyasa. Only very few brave people are qualified to take poorna sannyasa for the purposes of doing honest sadhana while keeping themselves aloof from ashram power politics and jealousies. My pranams to such brave soldier sadhakas! I had to halt my sadhana. Swamiji also advised me to go slow as he said that the age factor always counts. It was very difficult to switch off from the intensity of sadhana and go slow. I joined the University Law College for my law studies and after two years in 1985, I became a qualified lawyer and joined the Bar.

Thus another chapter and phase of intense sadhana was slowed down a little for a while until I picked up the threads once again later. I found it very difficult to continue higher practices as a householder. When your children are young, being a woman, you have the responsibilities of running a family, and you have to meet everyone's needs and demands. Somehow you do not get the environment or opportunity

to steady your meditation. I realized now why one should not marry and take to sannyasa if one is serious about being successful in meditation. Is this the lesson my mind was to transfer to my soul for my next birth? Perhaps I was going too fast without adequate self-purification and guidance, so there had to be a halt. Were my struggle and aspiration ever going to end?

It is said that sadhana should be performed for a considerable length of time. It must be continuous and it must be done with devotion. Perhaps, the sadhana has to be continuous so as to build a tempo for the explosion to take place. The lid of a pan on fire will only move if the water reaches boiling point. Oh God! Was I ever going to have the time and environment to practise meditation uninterrupted? Is a spiritual life more difficult for a woman saddled with the responsibilities of young children and the burdens of managing a household than for a man? I was a hostage of my own destiny and decision.

Was marriage then a serious mistake in the long run? Or was it a step towards greater purification and a balanced mind – a sine qua non for meditation? Perhaps I still had a lot of impurity or negativity in my vital consciousness which needed to be wiped off. Perhaps I weighed my duty and my dharma above everything. Or, maybe, I still needed the world more than I needed or trusted God.

It is only in this human body that one can experience the infinite. When the individual consciousness, detaching itself from the physical body, is thrown into vast space, you really experience vastness and are astonished. Imagine yourself in the air sitting in a plane. Suddenly, there is no plane, only you in your mental form in the vast space of the sky. Your mind is not adjusted to this new freedom from the body, to the idea of your existence outside your body. It is but natural that you will be frightened of what you may encounter there. That is why youth is the best time for meditation. Your nervous system has to be strong to sustain the impact of a different experience. Here you are alone; you have nothing

to hold on to; you have no guide. No wonder it is said that one should perform the higher practices of meditation only in the presence of the guru, especially if the kundalini is being activated, even mildly. The guru can handle you and lead you on safely towards its further awakening, but it is really wonderful to meditate. For in meditation we can have all the experiences we crave for through our five senses – touch, taste, smell, sight and hearing. In fact, we experience them more vividly and we get much more peace, happiness and feelings of power and purity.

One night, as I was sleeping, I woke up suddenly inside and saw a soft light on my *bhrikuti*, the space between the two eyebrows. It looked as if it was conveying a silent command. There was no mistaking the feeling as it seemed to say, “Come on.” The moment I saw the light I knew that I was going out of my body. This was my first experience of receiving a command by a soft light, appearing like a conscious being. I was absolutely dazed and astonished, even in that introverted state. How can light have life and intelligence? I shot out of myself like an arrow – up into the vast space. I was frightened and down I came again with great speed. I told myself not to be afraid and to enjoy it since this was similar to past experiences. I shot up again and returned. While I was up, I saw a beautiful blue sky and wonderful lights. I then woke up, feeling wide awake with full awareness and light-headed as always.

I had several out-of-body experiences. They were all almost involuntary. I could not make them happen at will except for a couple of incidents when I had determined that I was ready for the experience and I would somehow shoot out of my body. While there was fear, I was also exhilarated and surprised that I could exist without a body. The body felt really like a container or a skeleton. I felt a distance and a difference between my body and me. There was so much happiness, joy and wonder at being free from the body. Yes, I was alive on my own without a body – I, a mental ‘I’. I wondered whether this mental ‘I’ was the real ‘I’ which survived death. I maintained

my mental faculties and awareness. My mind was alive and functioning. I knew that I was out of my body and enormously happy. I knew that I felt great and I was aware that I was surprised or afraid. Knowing that I could live without my body, I was jubilant. The freedom was simply exhilarating and I lost all fears about death and dying.

Sometimes I would look at my hands or feet and I would feel a mental distance from them as if they did not belong to me, as if they belonged to a monkey. My consciousness would become a mental consciousness instead of the consciousness of being one with the physical body. My sense of 'I' would be more identified with the mental 'I' than the physical body. It was such a strange feeling. In the course of time, I guessed, I would get to identify this 'I' with the spiritual 'I'.

I was performing japa one night, when I became aware that I was neither in nor out. I was on the threshold of the conscious and the subconscious. Then I felt a vibratory wave pass through me, conveying that a person I knew was going to be ill. I was very surprised when the next day, on making inquiries I discovered that the person was admitted to a hospital the same morning, and stayed there for several days. This was my first experience of vibrations conveying a message to the subconscious mind and how the subconscious mind interpreted those vibrations into thoughts on the conscious plane. The universal mind receives thought vibrations from everywhere. By tuning our conscious minds with the universal or inner mind at the same wavelength, we can translate those vibrations into thoughts. Perhaps, this is how intuitive knowledge dawns on the mind. The outer mind has to somehow merge or connect with the inner mind. While performing japa my mind must have accidentally bonded with my inner mind. I came to extroverted consciousness as someone entered the room, and the conscious mind tuned at a subtle level, picked up the vibrations and translated them automatically into thoughts. If I had not come out of my introversion and instead gone to sleep, I would have lost the experience.

Swamiji explained this to me in the *Yoga Initiation Papers* beautifully with a lovely diagram. For the benefit of readers, I reproduce it here:

Dear Situ, blessed child,

Love and blessings.

Some more instructions regarding sadhana. These may be added to your 'Initiation Papers' and a copy may be sent to Basanti. These form a part of diksha instructions to be given to you.

My thoughts are reaching you, your thoughts are reaching me. Our inner consciousness is in tune with our thoughts. But, since, we haven't connected our outer consciousness with the inner one, we are unable to express or understand those radiations on our consciousness plane.

Concentration and meditation will effect that desired connection between the outer mind and the inner one. When that is over, you will simultaneously receive my thoughts on your conscious plane, as soon as they are received by the inner one.

Whatever the mind thinks is of a refined quality. It isn't gross. The ordinary mind is still not capable to convert those refined and subtle radiations into gross experiences.



Normal conditions

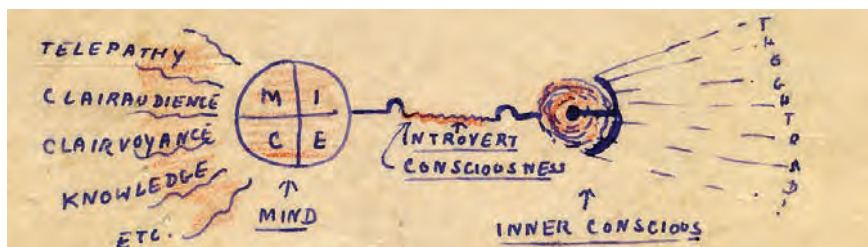
In the above figure the mind is connected with ten sense perceptions, but naturally it is disconnected from the consciousness, which is receiving constant thought radiations through its all-pervading sources.

Now we have to connect this consciousness with the inner one. This is possible only when the senses have been withdrawn towards consciousness by any method.



During sadhana

No sooner that the sense perceptions are introverted in concentration and meditation and look at the inner consciousness, the two faculties of jiva are plugged with each other. The sense perceptions are merged into inner consciousness and rendered subtle enough to conduct those thought radiations into the external mind.



During siddhi

Thus, when the mind and senses re-introverted towards the centre or inner consciousness, the thought radiations (towards which the inner consciousness is ever receptive) are conducted towards the outer consciousness or mind. When this is done, you naturally become capable of understanding, following and perceiving those radiations, which I send, on the plane of the indriyas or gross perceptions.

What your inner consciousness receives from me are subtle 'radiations'. And what your mind is capable of thinking are 'thoughts'. In order to transcribe 'radiations' into 'thoughts' what you have to do is to reduce 'thoughts' into a finer stuff by the practice of a) pratyahara, b) dharana, c) dhyana and d) samadhi.

Now, your mental thoughts have been converted into a form of 'consciousness'. Naturally, it has become capable of receiving, understanding and expressing those 'radiations'. When this is practised for a pretty long time, then you will be able to understand this process at will, even while you are outwardly conscious. Of course, in the beginning those radiations are assimilated and understood, only to be forgotten during the wake of sense-consciousness.

At a certain stage, those radiations are remembered during the wake of sense-consciousness, like distant dreams. When the sadhaka is blessed by the Guru, he simultaneously receives and expresses those radiations even during the wake of sense consciousness. What to talk of it in samadhi!

PHASES OF CONSCIOUSNESS

The mental conditions at the wake of sense perceptions may be termed as 'external consciousness'. The mental conditions during the process of concentration and meditation may be termed as 'introverted consciousness'. The mental conditions during samadhi may be termed as 'inner consciousness'. These again may be termed as mind (thoughts), *chitta* (sensations), and *jnana* (knowledge), respectively; or conscious, subconscious and superconscious.

Extroverted consciousness, *bahirmukhi vritti*

The condition of the mind, when the experiences take place through the medium of ten senses, fourfold mind and five pranas (nineteen in all), is to be known as 'extroverted consciousness'. This consciousness is responsible for our

waking conditions. It hasn't got the capacity to be in tune with subtle thought radiations.

Introverted consciousness, *antarmukhi vritti*

The condition of the mind, when sense perceptions and mental activities are united in one thought current, and the mind experiences irrespective of gross objects, is to be known as 'introverted consciousness'. This state is materialized in true concentration and achieved fully in deep meditation. It hasn't got the capacity to be in tune with gross perceptions. It is a state wherein sensations are in full swing and wherein, there is but one idea, one form and one sound.

Inner consciousness, *antar chetana*

The condition of the mind, when no sense perceptions, mental sensations and no idea, name or form remain, is known as the state of 'inner consciousness'. It hasn't the capacity to be in tune with gross sense perception. It is a state where subtle thought radiations, light, sounds and forms are experienced. This state is just what we call samadhi, a direct culmination of dharana and dhyana. It is here that the 'knowledge' dawns.

From extroverted to introverted consciousness – withdraw the mind and senses and aim at your divine ideal, by any project or yoga. From introverted to inner consciousness – keep on the project relentlessly.

EXPERIENCES

In extroverted consciousness

Seeing, hearing, tasting, touching etc. are of ten kinds, as you do during the waking condition. Then again there is thinking, desiring, wishing as you experience everyday. All this conscious life is to be termed as an expression of this extroverted consciousness.

In introverted consciousness

In the beginning, there are distractions, of course; you are aware of external perceptions also. Gradually, the external objects diminish. The form of your ishta, His name or idea get clearer and clearer.

There are scarce moments, when you land in blankness. At times, there is a feeling of ananda. At times, you visualize lights of various colours, you also experience the form of your ishta, either glowing with a light, or getting fused into an aroma of light. Then again, you hear some sweet enlightening unsounded omkar.

There are moments, when the surrounding space of your ishta is covered in flowers of innumerable colours.

At a certain stage, you will visualize men and women, places and things, which you have hitherto never seen or even thought of. This stage is just a glimpse of your previous life, but such experiences are rare, usually, one can't remember them after his return to normal extroverted consciousness.

Various flowers of beauty, places of charm and men and women are seen. There are a series of other experiences. There is a stage here, when physical passions trouble you or lower temptations try to assail you. There is also a tendency to revolt against these practices. You will balance your life and sadhana and help to surpass this test.

Inner consciousness

Normal sensations. Only the form remains. This mental form is in tune with that inner consciousness. Now the form becomes, what I call, conscious form, *chinmayavigraha*. This stage is an ultimate culmination of faith, sincerity and love. All other experiences cease, one even forgets oneself.

It is through the medium of this conscious form, that everything is achieved; one is blessed by this conscious form; informed, cautioned, prompted about events in life, guided and given the knowledge about the matters desired.

At first, the experiences of this stage are not at all remembered during the waking conditions, but gradually,

these experiences become vivid even during the gross condition of sense perceptions. If reminded by a guru, one can render them vivid earlier. At this stage, wisdom dawns, power is achieved and light perceived.

Pure consciousness

This pure consciousness is God or atman, which was called jiva on account of its tendencies to perceive externally. No sooner it is introverted, that it shines in its original glory.

Summary

See your ishta first; visualize him next; and realize him finally.

VARIOUS WAYS TO CONCENTRATE (IN LIGHT AND IN DARK)

Centres of concentration

i) central white spot of eye; ii) star with a spot; iii) space with star and central white spot; iv) similar regarding the right eye; v) central eyebrow; vi) left and right nostrils; vii) lips; viii) the whole face.

Process of ideation with eyes open

Eyes:

1. Look at the right eye intently. It emits brilliant sun rays. Look at the left eye intently. It emits soothing moonlight. Right eye is the sun, left is the moon.
2. The right star is the sun. The left star is the moon.
3. The white spot in the right star is the centre of the sun. The white spot in the left star is the centre of the moon.
4. The space behind and around the right star is the sunlit sky. The space behind and around the left star is the moonlit sky.
5. Concentrate on the right first; left next. Concentrate on each to such an extent that nothing else except the point of concentration is seen within your vision.

6. Start concentration on the white centre of the right star first. That is the bindu. That will not only become distinct, but begin to revolve around also. Ultimately, you will see nothing but a white spot. This white spot is the centre of the sun.
7. Then come to the spot of the other eye. Practise as per instructions on No 6.
8. Now come to the right star until you see nothing but the star with a centre. Similarly, concentrate on the left also. The right is the sun, the left is the moon.
9. Now concentrate on space; first right then left, as sunlit and moonlit skies respectively.
10. When the concentration on the white centre of the star has become keen and really successful then the next step becomes somewhat easier. That is to say you can more easily concentrate on the star. When this too has become successful, then the third step becomes still easier. That is to say the success of the previous step simplifies the following phase of concentration.

This much about the concentration on eyes. If this concentration on eyes is over and successful, the rest will become very easy. You will achieve success in a very short time.

Eyebrow: When the above has been accomplished, then concentrate on the central eyebrow, including both eyes also. This eyebrow is the seat of mystic energy, which gives light to both the sun and moon (eyes). Imagine that from the centre of the eyebrow light is flowing

Nostrils: When this has been successful, then include the nose and concentrate upon it. The two nostrils are twin rivers of vital consciousness. Concentrate upon them as flowing rivers of prana, Ida–Pingala or Ganga–Yamuna. At first concentrate on the right nostril, then on the left. Visualize that the two rivers of vital energy are entering through them.

Lips: When this has been accomplished, concentrate upon four pink petals of a lotus, dripping nectar drops off the lips. These lips are seats of nectar. Nectar drops of inexplicable sweetness drip from these lips. They are also the seats of bliss and divine smile. The colour is pink. They are four in number. Concentrate upon them as four lotus petals, pink in colour, sweet in smile, seat of nectarine drops.

Face: Now you can visualize the whole face as the cosmos – Brahmanda – having over its round space the sun, moon, Ganga, Yamuna, central energy and lotus petals.

Surrounding the face, there is an aura of light, streams of light.

This much of concentration with eyes open and the picture present in your front: a) concentration, b) ideation, c) japa should go on simultaneously, *savichara japa*.

Process of ideation with eyes closed

When it is quite dark and there is no light at all, then repeat the above process serially, on the mental screen, with eyes closed. Do it gradually, according to your centre of concentration while the eyes were open. Ultimately, visualize the whole face.

If, of course, you are able to visualize the whole face without any effort, then you needn't go into these rituals. And if you have developed your own process of concentration, then also you needn't go into these rituals.

Final

When all the processes are complete, then the whole face will become distinct, even in darkness, I mean on the mental screen. You can see it surrounded by a glow of astral light.

* * *

One of the most powerful experiences I had, was when, during meditation I lost my outer consciousness. With

that, I saw a dazzling light inside me as if a thousand bulbs had suddenly lit up all at once within a dark room. Every cell of my body was lit. It was amazing. ‘What is it?’ – my mind almost shouted with joy and wonder. Where did so much light come from? Was it the light of the Divine within me? There in front of me, so close to me, closer than my breath was a shadowy presence, which I could feel but not see clearly in the same manner as you cannot see in a dark room, only feel. It was the form of my inner guru, the form on which I meditated. So powerful and real was the living presence, I knew God existed within me. Swamiji wrote in his letter to Sushila in *Yoga Sadhana Part II* that there is a shadow-like manifestation of the soul in the first place.

It is amazing. One only has to strike the match and the spark of light ignites. At some point, one just needs to sit to meditate and the mind switches in. One has to turn the attention inwards so that the pure consciousness within us materializes in any form we choose. Swamiji explained that the first materialization is a shadow, which in the course of time is filled with life and light. You can see and experience the object of meditation as if in flesh and blood; talking to you and blessing you. All this is so mind-boggling but true.

While I was meditating one day, as the mind became still and calm and introverted, I virtually saw sparks of electric light at the base of my spine as if there was a short circuit. The moment my mind was diverted to the sensation, it disappeared.

I later read somewhere that when the kundalini stirs, it pushes the consciousness up and one gets an out-of-body experience. Does one really go out of the body into another dimension of reality or is it just a mental feeling? Or does one just transcend the body.

On another occasion, while meditating, I suddenly felt my mind or something subtle inside me starting to expand in all directions. It brought a happiness I cannot describe. This is the happiness I would feel when the object of meditation would suddenly become very clear. Several times

I experienced the feeling of being happy, really happy from within. Meditation gives us not only inner happiness but sense experiences also. I could smell incense, see flowers or a blue sky, hear melodious sounds which would go chin chin-chin-chin, or bells chiming, or the playing of the kartal.

Yet again I saw beauty in the abstract. I use the word 'saw' because I felt it so intensely; it was like actually seeing or being it. There was nothing but the feeling of abstract beauty. All was emptiness. There was nothing at all. Satyam, Shivam, Sundaram. God is beauty. The feeling was so intense and real that I still remember it. How can one actually see something abstract? I was very surprised.

Occasionally during meditation, I would lose myself and see light as if there was lightening in the sky. Often the object of meditation would become quite clear for a few seconds. I would feel so happy. Once it was so clear it looked as though the guru was actually there and the mind inside almost shouted with joy, 'Look he is there'.

One day as I and Upen in our house in Leamington Spa, England, looked at Swamiji's picture, we saw his face filled with a moving golden light, a light so pure, I had never seen that shade before. It started shining from the right side and moved to the left; and while doing so, it projected itself outwards towards us like the rays of the sun coming from the slit of a window; then as it slid towards the left it disappeared. I checked to see if it was the reflection of the sun on the picture, but it was really a light that moved inside the picture and the face glowed with the beautiful light. We were dumbfounded. It was like a light inside a laminated picture frame; shining beautifully.

If instead of our eyes being like cameras, I have sometimes wondered, they were microscopic or telescopic, how much more we would be able to see. Alas, our experiences are limited to our senses, but the mind is a compact sense, as is evident in a dream. It can be made subtle and trained to function on a different wavelength providing experiences of all the five senses.

As I mentioned earlier, I am a student on this path, not an authority, and I have absolutely no achievements. As I had to lead a householder's life, along with its corresponding responsibilities and struggles as a woman, my sadhana could not be continuous. It was interrupted a few times and took pauses during its long course, and yet, whatever I experienced could be useful to sadhakas. Every time I had to pick up the lost strings, every time I reflected over my past experiences and read my diary, even I thought they were unbelievable. No wonder a purely worldly person is unable to understand or believe spiritual experiences and scoffs at them.

Higher sadhana requires a change in diet and lifestyle. My life provided little opportunity for this. My Guru had ordained that I do sadhana as a householder and not become a sannyasin. He must have known that my consciousness needed purification and a family life, however incompatible with higher practices of sadhana, was necessary for purging, ultimately affording a better opportunity for spiritual progress. The journey of an arduous life as a householder cleansed my mind enormously. Whatever I experienced during my spells of intense sadhana was purely the grace of the Guru and was quite unusual for a householder, particularly a woman loaded with considerable responsibilities and duties. I hope and pray that they are worth sharing with others and that they could be of some help in understanding the mechanics of meditation.

I know from my experiences that I will live after death, for how long, where or in what form I do not know. I also experienced the witnessing consciousness within me. I know for certain that there is something more in this body than appears to be; that there is a real independent Conscious Being within me. It has far more intelligence and knowledge than I have. Having experienced that I do not die with death, I am no longer afraid of dying and death, although being connected with the body, one cannot avoid feeling physical pain.

Most of us are still struggling at the very initial stages of concentration, even as I am. Real enlightenment is still far away. This chapter was written simply as a signpost to sadhakas. It is not easy to plunge into yogic practices without a guide and the purpose of this book is to help you, dear reader, for a while, until you are able to find a real guru who would sustain you through this arduous journey. We need to ask someone for direction in the ordinary course of events when we go out to a new place. What can one say about this eternal quest of 'Who am I'? Everything is unfamiliar along the way. Higher sadhana should not be practised without the guidance of an able guru.

There are a few books on the experiences of the full awakening of kundalini. That is a real breakthrough in meditation. I have had no such luck. I do not know what brought on the experiences I had. It could be a temporary awakening of chakras or sushumna, or a stirring of the kundalini, but only Swami Niranjana with his enormous knowledge and experience can explain. Most sadhakas have to deal with these initial stages of experiences, and Swami Chidanandaji said that a description of what I experienced would benefit readers and suggested that I publish them.

I passed through different phases. During one phase of sadhana, I underwent a stage when I would become extremely restless. I would feel that something was going to happen but did not know what. The restlessness was almost killing. Why does one feel so restless?

During another phase, I noticed an intense attachment, fear, negativity and impurity in me that alarmed me. Sometimes I would want to sit quietly or sleep, sometimes I felt very hungry and at other times I did not feel like eating. As the mind became more introverted, the habit of drinking tea twice a day automatically disappeared. When pratyahara took place every desire seemed to disappear automatically and I did not have to put in any effort.

The senses would actually run inside like individual beings! The mind would withdraw forcefully inside by

itself. I only maintained the awareness of name and form. Something would happen inside, either light or sound or a movement or a presence, and my entire attention would be focused, like a person who suddenly sees a tiger.

Sometimes it felt as if a magnet appeared inside me pulling the senses and mind inward in a flash of a second even when the mind was disturbed and distracted. How beautiful was the feeling of this conscious magnet! One was reminded precisely of Krishna playing his flute and the gopis running senselessly to Him.

I noticed that I could not achieve the state of centralized and focused mind with my efforts. I had to let go and surrender, expecting nothing. The technique was to sincerely pray, and then wait. When the mind becomes extremely quiet and still, like the absolute stillness of a dark night in a quiet forest of thick, tall, dense trees, even a thought or a prayer, an emotion or an expectation, disturbs the tenuous condition of inner silence and stillness, creating a ripple in the mind's lake. Yes, even breathing becomes a mild disturbance. Everything comes to a near halt – your thoughts, your breath. You almost cannot breathe, you cannot think – total stillness.

My breathing would become extremely slow, my thoughts would cease. It was at that moment that I jumped over the mind in an out-of-body experience and forgot who I was or where I was. There was a fusion of prana and thought, ida and pingala. I am reminded of the saying, 'If thy eye be one, thee will see the light'. Yes, breathing and thinking are the two eyes and when they merge in one, there is illumination. How cleverly saints have explained mystic revelations in symbolic language. After coming out of meditation, I always felt very light and the brain would kind of open up, become alert and wide awake. I would feel tremendous activities and sensations in the brain, as though new channels were opening. I understood that this is why regular meditation is important – to keep these grooves open and developing further.

Something was happening to my mind. It was changing. My brain was empty; I was not thinking at all. It needed tremendous effort to understand the meaning of one paragraph. I had to read it repeatedly and strain myself. I would meet a person, I would recognize her but somehow I would not remember her name! There was a growing blankness in the mind. Oh God! What was happening to my mind? Was I becoming a vegetable or like an infant? How was I going to function without a mind? I was terrified. When I asked Swami Atmananda, she said that this was a temporary phase. However, it was all right to pass through this temporary phase if I was in an ashram, but as a householder, I had to handle day-to-day matters and use my mind. My life did not afford me the time to pass through this phase of sadhana. My family wholly depended on me. I wished someone would tell me why my brain was switching off; why I felt as if I was unable to think at all; why the force inside me was getting so strong it would throw me off; why I felt such intense psychic heat in my body; why I felt the form of meditation so intensely. I was once again at the crossroads and did not know where to turn. I prayed for direct divine help.

I also noticed that I could easily give away anything to anyone however valuable without any feeling of being exploited as against the normal human nature to collect things and keep them for oneself. I lost value for worldly possessions. Was I becoming foolish too? But I was experiencing within me that mild intoxication that nothing affected me. As I looked in every eye, behind it I saw the same consciousness that I saw in that faceless face-experience looking at me. I understood why Swami Sivananda treated an evil man who came to harm him with compassion. He always saw that one limitless consciousness peeping through infinite eyes. Yes, one light in infinite lamps! There was only one Beloved in every one. For me everything worldly lost significance. The mind was changing as buttermilk changes into butter.

I felt immense heat in my body and my touch seemed to relieve pain in others. My thoughts would materialize, so

that if I thought of someone, I would receive a phone call from her or, I would pick up the thought of another person with me. If I wanted something, it was automatically brought to me. I would get an inkling of what was likely to happen; whether my petition in court would be rejected or I would win the case; whether the judge would not turn up, and so on. I knew if a person I met had jealousy in his thoughts and if he was a well-wisher or a hypocrite. I became sensitive to auras, to colours of greed and passion and to the thoughts of others. All these things happened for a while during my period of intense sadhana. They occurred of their own accord and I had no control. Someone inside me prompted me into knowing things. How could I not develop a love for this inner antaryamin who was like a human being with superior intelligence? My life was carefree and dependent on inner guidance. I could not do without it. I could rely on its accuracy one hundred per cent. But the problem was that this prompting did not always happen when I needed it. This was a one-way traffic but there was no other alternative.

Having placed all my attention on my consciousness I was bonded to it and found myself at last falling in love with my very own Self. The same consciousness is within every one of us, but one generally connects one's attention with the consciousness in another person and thus seeks love and oneness. If only we can connect our attention with our own consciousness, our love would turn from *ishque mijaji*, worldly love, to *ishque hakiki*, divine love.

All these psychic happenings diminished or disappeared as I slowed down my sadhana, but the purpose of writing this is not to make an exhibition of psychic gifts of this nature. It is rather to tell the readers that it is true that the practice of meditation is useful and beneficial even in one's daily worldly life. So either way, one should try to meditate every day.

By writing my spiritual experiences I am aware that I am exposing myself to ridicule, criticism and even uncharitable remarks from people, especially many intellectuals and academics, with whom I have to interact at times, and who

do not understand them, but I run this risk in the service of my Guru. I have the support of my family.

* * *

Let us see what Swamiji said about kundalini awakening. I quote from *Teachings of Swami Satyananda Saraswati, Volume 1*:

The most unique and common experience is the release of energy, like an electrical shock in the spinal cord, as though your spinal cord is illuminated. You feel an electric current at the base of your spine as if it were connected to an electric power point.

Prior to that you begin to hear a sound that goes on continuously without a break. You don't produce the sound but it is there. When this sound is experienced, one should understand that the auspicious moment is drawing near.

There are also related after-experiences. You may hear the sound of a flute or a peacock. You may have momentary experiences, such as a feeling that you are sitting outside in the middle of a monsoon shower. There is also the experience of dark clouds in continuous motion, and the sound of thunder.

Awakening of the kundalini is one of the happiest and most momentous events in man's life.

... when a sudden awakening of the kundalini occurs, since you are not familiar with the experience, you are confused, but if you have been practising hatha yoga, etc., and you experience a slight awakening periodically, you will be better able to cope with it.

Even though people should be careful about awakening the kundalini, I believe it is a very important, pleasant and historical experience in the life of a person. If you can see and experience something more than what you can generally see and experience through your senses, you are a fortunate person. At the same time, I also know that if you begin to have such experiences you will be startled and frightened and will wonder what is happening. Therefore,

before the actual awakening of kundalini, it is better to experience a mild awakening of the chakra centres.

... if the awakening occurs without proper purification of the body, you may occasionally feel dizzy, indolent, angry, high or low tempered, and so on. Digestive problems may occur. Some people also experience eruptions on the body.

... One has to first purify the diet, then perform hatha yoga, practise japa sincerely, with the help of mantras, experience a little awakening through music, and then go on to the more intense practices for kundalini awakening.

... It takes six months to purify the bodily systems.

... You can awaken kundalini through kirtan and through pranayama. If you don't like these, you can perform selfless service, *nishkama seva*, and awaken kundalini.

... when the mind is purified, when the veil of avidya is rent asunder, the awakening of kundalini can occur either through mantra yoga, kirtan or purification of the body by means of karma yoga or pranayama. However, how can you do nishkama seva all the time? And you can't do kirtan day and night. So, there must be a synthesis of the paths – karma yoga, bhakti yoga, raja yoga and jnana yoga.

... There are three planes: instinctive, intellectual and intuitive. Man's energy passes through the intellectual plane, while the energy of the great yogis passes through the intuitive plane and the energy of animals passes through the instinctive plane. The instinctive and intellectual planes are in the body, but the intuitive plane is beyond the body.

So, animals can see, hear, walk and feel, but they are not aware of what is happening. A dog may be barking, but it does not know it is barking. It has not developed the consciousness of the event in time and space. Animals have an awakening on the instinctive plane.

... It is said that there is a small pit in the brain where the central power lies dormant waiting to be tapped. Once we can trigger the awakening of that power, the creative centres of the brain which are presently lying dormant are brought into activity.

... Although people believe there are risks involved in the awakening of kundalini, there is no danger. For some time you may just want to sit. You may not want to work, sleep or eat. You may feel thirsty or you may feel nauseated. You may feel restricted or closed in. You may be assailed with passion and all kinds of fleeting disturbances. These experiences may occur for some time until you are stabilized. Then you will be able to live like a normal person, but you will know so much more.

There are many people who awaken their kundalini and know nothing about it.

* * *

Let us see what Paramguru Swami Sivananda said about spiritual experiences. I quote from his book, *Concentration and Meditation*, Chapter 9, Experiences in Meditation:

When first starting meditation, lights of various colours, such as red, white, blue, green, a mixture of red and green appear in front of the forehead. They are tanmatric lights. Every tattwa has its own hue. Prithvi tattwa has a yellow colour. Apas tattwa has white. Agni has a red colour, and vayu has green. Akasa has a blue colour. The coloured lights are due to these tattwas.

Sometimes a big sun or moon, or lightening-like flashes appear in front of the forehead during meditation.

Sometimes devas, rishis or nitya siddhas will appear during your meditation. Receive them with honour. Bow to them. Get advice from them. They appear before you to help and give you encouragement. You will see in the centre of the forehead a resplendent, flashing light. This will last for half a minute or one minute and then disappear.

During meditation you will have no idea of time. You will not hear any sound. You will have no idea of the environment. You will forget your name and all types of relationships with others. You will enjoy peace and bliss.

When you enter into deep meditation, you will have no consciousness of your body or surroundings, you will have equanimity of mind. When you enter silence through deep meditation, the world outside and all your troubles drop away.

When you practise rigorous meditation, *kevala kumbhaka* or the natural retention of breath with *pooraka*, inhalation, and *rechaka*, exhalation, will happen on its own. When *kevala kumbhaka* occurs, you will enjoy immense peace and you will have a one-pointed mind.

During deep meditation, the aspirant forgets the external world first and then the body.

That feeling of rising up during meditation is a sign that indicates that you are going above body-consciousness.

Concentration is fixing the mind on any one point, external or internal. During meditation the mind becomes calm, serene and steady. The various rays of the mind are collected and focused on the object of meditation. The entire energy of the mind is concentrated on that one idea. The senses become still. They do not function.

Do not try to drive away unimportant thoughts. The more you try, the more they will return, and the more they will gain strength, and you will tax your energy. Become indifferent. Fill the mind with divine thoughts, and the stray thoughts will gradually vanish.

When your meditation becomes deep, you will lose consciousness of the body. You will feel that there is no body. You will experience immense joy. There will be mental consciousness.

To attain samadhi, one should observe strict brahmacharya, dietary restrictions and have purity of heart.

When you practise meditation, worldly thoughts, cravings or *vasanas* are suppressed. If you are irregular in meditation and if your dispassion wanes, they try to manifest again. They persist and resist. Therefore, be regular in meditation and perform more rigorous sadhana.

Meditation will save you from all sorrows.

Anahata sounds or melodies are the mystic sounds heard by the yogi at the beginning of his cycle of meditation. This is a sign of purification of the *nadis* or astral currents, due to pranayama. Practise to listen from the right ear only, because the solar nadi, *pingala*, is on the right side of the nose. The anahata sound is also called *omkara dhvani*. It is due to the vibration of the prana in the heart.

The nada that is heard is of ten kinds. The first is chini (like the sound of the word chini); the second is chini-chini; the third is the sound of a bell; the fourth is that of a conch; the fifth is that of a tantri (lute); the sixth is of tala (cymbals); the seventh is of a flute; the eighth is of a bheri (drum); the ninth is that of the mridanga (double drum) and the tenth is that of thunder.

Before you set foot on the ladder's upper rung, the ladder of mystic sounds, you have to hear the voice of your inner god (your highest self) in seven ways. The first is like the nightingale's sweet voice chanting a song of parting to its mate. The second is the sound of the silver cymbals of the dhyanis, awakening the twinkling stars. The next is the melodious plaint of the ocean-spirit imprisoned in its shell, and that is followed by the sound of the veena. The fifth sound of the bamboo flute shrills in your ear. It changes next into a trumpet blast. The last vibrates like the dull rumbling of a thundercloud. The seventh swallows all the other sounds. They die, and then are heard no more.

Various kinds of lights manifest during meditation owing to concentration. In the beginning, a bright white light, the size of a pinpoint will appear in the forehead in the *trikuti*, the space between the two eyebrows, which corresponds tentatively to the ajna chakra of the astral body.

You will notice when your eyes are closed, different coloured lights, white, yellow, red, smoky, blue, green, mixed lights, flashes like lightening, like a fire, burning charcoal, fireflies, the moon, sun and the stars. These lights appear in the mental space, the *chidakasha*. When

you first observe this, be assured that the mind is becoming steadier and that you are progressing in concentration.

The size of light will increase and you will see a full blaze of white light, larger than the sun. In the beginning these lights are not steady. They come and disappear immediately. They flash out from above the forehead and from the sides. They cause a peculiar sense of extreme joy and happiness and there is an intense desire for the vision of these lights. The vision of the lights is a great encouragement in sadhana.

The appearance of lights denotes that you are transcending physical consciousness. You are in a semiconscious state when the light appears. You are between two planes. You must not shake your body when these lights manifest. You must breathe very, very slowly.

Sometimes during meditation, you will see a brilliant dazzling light. You will find it difficult to gaze at this light. You will be compelled to withdraw your mental vision from it. This dazzling light is the light emanating from the sushumna in the heart.

You will see two kinds of forms – the lustrous forms of devatas and physical forms. You will see your *ishta devata* or tutelary deity, your guiding devata, wearing a handsome dress, with several valuable ornaments, flowers, garlands, with four hands and with weapons. Siddhas, rishis, etc. appear to encourage you. You will find a huge collection of devatas and celestial ladies with various musical instruments in their hands. You will see beautiful flower gardens, fine palatial buildings, rivers, mountains, golden temples and scenery, so lovely and picturesque as cannot be adequately described.

It is easy to control the mind by concentrating on the trikuti. If you decide to fix on the trikuti, stick to it always. Do not make frequent changes. Steadiness is necessary. The beings and objects with whom you are in touch with during the early period of meditation belong to the astral world. They are similar to human beings minus a physical

overcoat. They have desires, cravings, love, hatred, just as human beings have. They have fine bodies. They can move about freely. They have powers of materialization, dematerialization, multiplying and clairvoyant vision of an inferior order. The lustrous forms are higher devatas of mental or higher planes who come down to give you darshan, and encourage you. Various shaktis manifest in lustrous forms. Adore them. Worship them. Perform a mental pooja as soon as they give you darshan. Angels are beings of mental or higher planes. They also appear before your mind's eye.

Sometimes, you will feel invisible help, possibly from your ishta devata when you are actually pushed from the physical body into the new plane. That invisible power assists in separating you from the body and going beyond body-consciousness.

Do not waste your time looking at these visions. They are only a curiosity. They are all encouragements to convince you of the existence of super-physical and metaphysical realities and the solid existence of Brahman. Drive these pictures out. Fix yourself on the goal.

Sometimes during meditation, you will see an infinite blue sky, ethereal space. You will see yourself in the blue space as a black dot. Occasionally your form will appear in the centre of the light. At times, you will notice highly vibrating, rotating particles in the light. You will see physical forms, human forms, children, women, adult males, rishis with beards, siddhas and lustrous tejomaya forms. Visions are either subjective or objective, your own mental reactions, or of realities on finer planes of matter.

The universe consists of planes of matter of various grades of density. Rhythmical vibrations of tanmatras in various degrees give rise to the formation of several planes. Each plane has its entities and beings. Your visions may consist of these entities or beings. They may be purely imaginary. They may be a crystallization of your own thinking. You

must discriminate in yogic practices. Reason and common sense must be used throughout.

You cannot describe the taste of candy to a man who has never tasted it; you cannot communicate the idea of colour to one born blind. All that the teacher can do is to tell his disciple the method of knowing the truth or the path that leads to the unfolding of the intuitional faculty.

These are the signs that indicate that you are growing in meditation and approaching God. You will have no attraction for the world. Sensual objects will no longer tempt you. You will become desireless, fearless, I-less and mine-less. *Dehadhyasa*, attachment to the body, will gradually dwindle. You will not entertain such ideas as: 'She is my wife; he is my son; this is my house'. You will feel that all are manifestations of the Lord. You will behold God in every object.

The body and mind will become light. You will always be cheerful and happy. The mind will only produce the image of the Lord. You will have no body-consciousness. Even if there is body-consciousness, it will be in the form of mental retention.

A drunkard may not have full consciousness that he has a cloth around his body. He may feel that something is hanging loosely on his body. Similarly, you have a feeling of the body. You will feel that something is sticking to you like a loose cloth or loose shoes.

You will have no attraction for sex. You will have no sex idea. Women will appear to you as manifestations of the Lord. Money and gold will appear to you as pieces of stone. You will have intense love for all creatures.

You will be absolutely free of lust, greed, anger, jealousy, pride, delusion, and so on. You will have peace of mind even when people insult you, beat you and persecute you. The reason why you are not perturbed is because you get immense spiritual strength from the inner dweller or the Lord. Pain and pleasure, success or failure, honour

or dishonour, respect or disrespect, gain or loss, are all alike to you.

Even in your dreams, you are in communion with the Lord. You will converse with the Lord in the beginning. You will see Him in physical form.

Dispassion and discrimination, serenity, self-restraint, one-pointedness of the mind, ahimsa, satyam, purity, forbearance, fortitude, patience, forgiveness, absence of anger, a spirit of service, sacrifice, love for all, will be your habitual qualities. You will be a cosmic friend and benefactor.

In *samadhi* or the superconscious state, the meditator loses his individuality and becomes identical with the Supreme Self. He becomes an embodiment of bliss, peace and knowledge.

Contentment, an unruffled state of mind, cheerfulness, patience, a reduction in excretions, a sweet voice, eagerness and steadiness in the practice of meditation, disgust for worldly prosperity, success and company, a desire to remain alone in a quiet room or in seclusion, a desire to associate with sadhus and sannyasins, *ekagrata*, one-pointedness of the mind, are some of the signs which indicate that you are growing in purity, that you are prospering along the spiritual path.

Whatever your past life or history may be, work out your salvation.

You will sometimes see a vast bright golden light. Within the light you will see your ishta devata in front. Sometimes you will see yourself within the light. You will see a gold-coloured light all around. You may see your ishta devata as large as a mountain, and shining like the sun. You may see the figure while eating, drinking or working. When you enjoy the bliss of this vision, you will experience no taste for food while eating. You will simply swallow the food. You will hear the continuous ringing of the veena. You may see the blazing light of the sun.

The object of your meditation will come before you much quicker if you practise regular meditation. You will feel as

if you are covered by the object on which you meditate. You will see the whole of space illumined. You will feel the inner peace of the soul. The highest goal or realization is profound silence or supreme peace, wherein all thoughts cease and you become identical with the Supreme Self.

He who does japa, pranayama and meditation, feels a lightness of the body. Rajas and tamas decrease. The body becomes light. The sudden jerks during meditation occur especially when the prana becomes slow and the outward vibrations make the mind come down from its union with the Lord to the level of physical consciousness. The mind becomes very subtle by the practice of japa, kirtan, meditation and pranayama. The power of thinking is also developed.

You will hear the melodious sound of *Om* during meditation. You will see the form of your Guru. During the course of practice, one day you will feel that you have separated from your body. You will have immense joy mixed with fear, joy in the possession of a new, light astral body, fear owing to entering a foreign, unknown plane. You may feel you are rotating or floating in the air and consequently there is fear of falling.

You will never fall, but the new experience of subtlety generates novel feelings and sensations in the beginning. How you leave the body, remains unknown at the outset. You are suddenly startled, when you have completely separated. The new joy is inexpressible and indescribable in words.

You are unaware of how you have left your body, but you are fully conscious of your return. Just as air enters through the crevices of a window, you enter with the new astral body into the physical body. There is an intense craving to regain that new consciousness and to remain in that state always. You are not able to stay for a period longer than three, five or ten minutes in the new region. Further you can hardly leave the body at will, through simple willing in the beginning. By chance, through your efforts, you are able to separate from the body in a

month during the course of sadhana. If you plod on with patience, perseverance and firmness, you will be able to leave the body at will and stay for a longer period in the new plane with the new subtle body. You are quite safe from identification with the body. You have conquered dehadhyasa only if you can leave the body at will and stay for a longer period in the new region – for two to three hours. Your position is quite secure then, not otherwise.

Mouna, the vow of silence, solitude, living alone are sine qua non to achieve this end. Withdraw yourself from society as much as possible. Too much talk is simply a waste of energy. If this energy is conserved by mouna, it will be transmuted into *ojas* or spiritual energy which will help you in sadhana. Speech is a very powerful energy. Always remember this.

After continuous hard practice, you will be able to separate yourself from the body, frequently. A practice will have been established. As soon as you silence the thought and calm the mind, the mental habit of slipping from the physical body supervenes automatically. There is no difficulty then. The mind enters a new groove and appears on a new stage or platform.

You can simply, by mere willing, travel to any place you like with the astral body. Thought-reading, thought transference also can be quite easily performed by those who can function with the astral body. Concentrated mental rays can penetrate opaque walls, just as X-rays pass through the flesh.

You first separate yourself from the body, then you identify yourself with the mind and then you function on the mental plane, with this fine body, just as you do on this earth plane. Through concentration, you rise above body-consciousness; through meditation, you rise above the mind; and finally through samadhi, you become one with the Brahman. These are the three important *antaranga sadhanas*, internal means, to the achievement of final beatitude.

The lower mind is withdrawn from the external, objective world. The senses are abstracted in the mind. The individual mind becomes one with the cosmic mind or *hiranyagarbha* or over-soul, the soul of the universe, the one common thread-soul or *sutratma*. The functions of intellect, the objective mind and the senses are suspended. The yogi becomes a living soul.

Cosmic consciousness is perfect awareness of the oneness of life. The yogi feels that the universe is filled with one life. He actually feels that there is no such thing as a blind force or dead matter, but that all is alive, vibrating and intelligent.

Samadhi or blissful divine experience arises when the ego and the mind are dissolved. It is a state to be attained by one's own effort. It is limitless, divisionless and infinite; an experience of being and of pure consciousness. You will realize at all times and under all circumstances that you are identical with invisible existence, knowledge and bliss; that you pervade all persons and objects; and that you are beyond all limitations.

After a short practice of meditation, you will feel that the body gets lighter within a short time, say fifteen to thirty minutes after you have taken your seat in padma, siddha or sukhasana, according to your taste or temperament. You may be semiconscious of the body also. There is a great deal of happiness owing to concentration. This is happiness resulting from concentration, it is ananda which is quite different from sensual pleasures. This kind of happiness is more lasting, sustained, self-contained and real, as it emanates from the atman.

You can distinctly feel that the mind is moving, that it is leaving its seat in the brain and that it is trying to go to its *yathasthana*, original seat. You know that it has left its old groove and is now passing into the new groove in the avenue. As a result of meditation, new channels are formed in the brain, new thought currents are generated and new brain cells are formed. There is a transformed

psychology altogether. You have a new brain, a new heart, new feelings, new sentiments and new sensations.

Sometimes, these elementals appear during meditation. They are strange figures, some with long teeth, some with large faces, some with big bellies, others with faces on their bellies, and still others with faces on their heads. They are bhootas. They do not cause any harm at all. They come to test your strength and courage. They can do nothing. Repetition of a few omkaras will throw them to a distance. You must be fearless. A coward is absolutely unfit for the spiritual line.

Develop courage by constantly feeling you are the atman. Practise *nididhyasana*, deep meditation, continuously for all the twenty-four hours. That is the secret; that is the key.

As a merchant closing the year's ledger and opening a new one does not enter all the items of the old ledger into the new one, but only its balances, so does the spirit hand over to the new brain his judgments on the experiences of a life that is closed; the conclusions to which he has come; the decisions to which he has arrived. This is the stock handed over to the new life, the mental furniture for the new dwelling, a real memory.

Different people get different spiritual experiences. There cannot be a common experience for all. It depends on the temperament, the mode of sadhana, the place of concentration and various other factors. Some hear melodious sounds. Some see lights. Some get *ananda*, spiritual bliss. Some get both prakash and ananda.

If your general health is sound, if you are cheerful, happy and strong physically and mentally, if your mind is peaceful and unruffled, if you get ananda during meditation and if your will is growing stronger, purer and irresistible, realize that you are improving in meditation and everything is progressing in the right direction. The divine light comes not through open doors but through narrow slits. The aspirant sees the ray as a sunbeam passing through a chink into a dark room. It is like a flash of lightening.

This sudden illumination chokes all sounds of words. The aspirant is spellbound in ecstasy and awe.

So bright and glorious is the light environing the divine that the initiate is dazzled and bewildered. You may behold a dazzling light with abrupt motion. You may behold a head of spectacular form, of the colour of a flame, red as fire and fearful to look at. It has three wings of marvellous length and breadth, white as a dazzling cloud. At times they beat together terribly and again are still. The head never utters a word, but remains altogether still. Now and again its extended wings may flap.

If you get spiritual visions, do not fall back in terror. Do not mistake them for phantoms. Do not give up sadhana. Plod on diligently. Break one veil after another.

Aspirants are eager to attain spiritual experiences quickly. As soon as they get them, they are afraid. They are terribly alarmed when they go beyond body-consciousness. They entertain a passing fear whether they will come back again or not. We are used to certain limitations. When these limitations suddenly drop away we feel that there is no definite base left to stand on. That is the reason why we are afraid when we go beyond body-consciousness. It is a novel experience. Courage is needed. Courage is an indispensable requisite.

When you advance in meditation, you can see your ishta devata in physical form. Sometimes the Lord will come before you in the form of a beggar or sick man with dirty rags. He may appear before you in the form of a coolie or a man of low caste. You must have a keen sense to detect Him. Your hair will stand on end when you meet Him.

During deep meditation, you will gain *jjyotirmaya darshan*. You will behold a huge pillar of light. You will see infinite light and you will merge yourself in it. You will be struck with awe and wonder. Rise above the visions. The visions that you see during meditation are a hindrance on the path to samadhi or God-realization. When you see them, the mind will be fixed on these visions throughout the

day instead of on God. Avoid these visions and thinking about them. Be indifferent. Substitute the thought of the Lord.

If you practise regular meditation and concentration, you are bound to get some psychic powers. You should not use these powers for base and selfish purposes, for gaining material ends. You will then face a downfall. Action and reaction are equal and opposite. Every wrong action is bound to cause a reaction.

* * *

I have narrated my own experiences, big and small during the course of my sadhana. These have remained incommunicable to others, including those most dear to me. This lack of wider sharing was of course a part of a larger discipline inculcated in me by Swamiji. When necessary he reminded me through his letters that such experiences do occur in one's spiritual evolution, but one must not pay too much attention to them. They come to encourage the sadhaka.

A prime message was: Be a *drashta*, a witness, to these experiences, not its author. Bearing witness to transformations of one's consciousness is far more difficult than to claim the pride of authorship, which says "I received this experience because I was singularly eligible for it." This would be wrong since the experiences constantly suggest that the 'I' is always changing, dissolving, reconfiguring. Vanity of authorship renders oneself gradually unworthy of such experiences.

Becoming a *drashta* helps to limit the arrogance of interpretation. Why a certain type of experience happened, when, and how is not for the *drashta* to ask, nor is it for her to claim an understanding of why some experiences recur and others do not. Being a *drashta* means that you receive these in humility as Guru's grace. Interpreting the meaning is also the gift of the Guru, not the *drashta*.

Each experience is unique and bearing witness to it is always a unique privilege. Each experience changes the

drashta in you; and each leaves a glorious spiritual residue. That is the drashta's reward and the Guru may explain (should you be so blessed) the reasons why.

Earthquakes are a part of a being named as earth; tsunamis define the being of oceans; skies are rent asunder by thunder and lightning. Such also is the being of a sadhaka as a drashta exposed to these upheavals. In each situation, something is always destroyed and some new 'things' are born anew.

The sadhaka/drashta dies and is also reborn amidst such experiences. This then is the timeless meaning of yoga as a union of the Purusha and Prakriti.

May each one of us then find our own Satyam!



Part 2

Meditative Poetry

I have been
an undeserving
child
but your grace
has never
left me

what karmas
have I done
in the past
lives that
the beatitude
of your kind
glance has
fallen upon me

forgive me
my God
for all my weaknesses
and follies

the hold of Maya
is so great
without your grace
it is impossible to

tear off the veils of
desire, attachment
ego and jealousy

I have found
refuge at your feet,
My God
and your Name has
gladdened my sorrowful
heart

I go on repeating
Om Namah Shivaya
and it fills my heart
with joy and peace
that one can never
find in this world of
name and form
of me and mineness

yes, I have
found peace
that comes from
giving up things
when I gave up the
thought of all
possessions from
my mind and
felt you in your
creation
the pure consciousness
spread out in this
wondrous creation
and limitless Beyond

unto my God
I bow my head

in all humility
and shame
over my many betrayals
of promised love
and surrender

but you, O Cruel Beloved
created Maya and
subjected the human
heart helplessly
to its merciless
onslaughts
only you can now
redeem it

I have taken refuge
in your Naam
and I rejoice
in the shelter
I have taken

like the cat
holding the kitten
in its mouth
may you hold me
in your arms
for, I have no
strength to hold
your hand tight

Unto you
my Guru
I offer the deepest
aspirations of my heart
there is none
other like you

I have roamed
the whole day
the sun is setting
and, I am tired
at last I have come
back to your door
like a lost pet
coming back to
its master

don't drive me away
however undeserving
I am
I am your child
take me in your arms
for, you promised
you are my Mother
and will not
mind my mess

who has awakened
in my body
this restlessness
this longing
for whom
who is it that
my heart longs for
an encounter with the
Divine

O, Divine Light
I saw you that day
like a thousand bulbs
at once lighting
a dark room
I felt your presence
closer than my

breath
in front of me
switching on every
cell of my body

May my longing be
for you, my God
and you alone
like a greedy man
amassing wealth
like a passionate man
longing for
his bride

let those things
alone happen
that are good
for me, however bitter
let not my erring judgment
want anything
let your Will
prevail over mine

the tempests of trials
follow me like a trail
wherever I go
will they never end
My Lord
how long will
you keep on
testing me and
exposing my weaknesses
how often you have
shown me my
helplessness
events seem
to move like a

finger on the page
of eternity

I lie at your door
silently waiting
patiently aspiring
when my Father
will you open the door
and throw your glance
at this unworthy
child of yours
out of pity,
even out of curiosity

the stream of emotions
has today once
again started flowing
without pre-thinking
or preplanning
you, the strong one
does it befit you
to show your
strength against a
poor woman like me

I have no knowledge
no degrees, no erudition
I am simple
like a child
and very foolish
my heart cries
tears want to
roll over my cheeks
without control
I am lonely
and alone
O, Antaryamin

you alone are mine
my friend
come, come, come to me
just once
and tell me
It is You!

I have cried
for you
in vain
O vain Beloved
why did you create me
if you had to
hide yourself
from me so deep

how hard it is
to find you
it is a lie
that you
respond when one
thinks of
you with love
my God
no, no, you are
very hard-hearted
you need a lot of
cajoling and
buttering
you too like
sycophancy
don't you

And yet I live
with eternal hope
in my heart
O sweet Lord

that you
will come
come one day

when passions leave me
when desires are
no more
when attachments do
not bind me
like ropes tying
a prisoner
when my ego is
dissolved
when my mind's lake is
still and silent
vast, unending
and without ripples
your reflection
will become
a reality

Yes, a reality of
eternal beauty
grace and charm
sweetness and honey
a glow of love and bliss
intoxicating every
fibre of my being
and, I will lose myself
and forget myself
in your loving
embrace

O force, when you
possess me
I feel purity
incarnate

don't leave me
possess me in full
so that I
lose myself
in that infinite
ocean of consciousness

I feel as if
the cells in my
brain are being
rebuilt
there is a peculiar
expanding of
space in it
the force within is
rejoicing
I am a free spirit

I am on a long pilgrimage
I have barely
come halfway
I am alone
and tired
the path is
gloomy and dark
will you speak with me
Oh God
so that listening to the sound
of your voice
I may safely pass through
the rest of this
arduous unknown journey

Hold my hand
and, lead me on
on and on
lest I stumble

and hurt myself
and you will be
unhappy to see
my bruises

the clouds are
thundering in the sky
the lightening is
getting fierce
the windowpanes of
my little house
are rattling hard
I am alone
inside my room
and, I call you
aloud to come and
give me solace

Don't leave me alone
O God
I call out to you
wrap me lovingly
in your fold or
I will be lost forever
and you will
once again be sad
to lose me
in the wilderness
of this world

this time O Lord
I will not be impatient
I will wait and wait
till you open the door
of your inner chamber
and take me in
your warm embrace

and make me one
with you
yes, I will wait
at thy door

make my vessel strong
O Lord
to sustain
the force of your beautiful light and
vision

O Divine
no more tests
no more obstacles
I want to think
of you
all the time

I want your grace
to sustain my efforts
however feeble
to adhere to my sadhana
and to continue with it

give me favourable
circumstances
remove all my worries
give me an opportunity
to steady my thoughts
in you

is it too much to ask
I ask not for
worldly prosperity
I ask for communion
with you

I am tired of working
will I never find
leisure and solitude
my mind bereft of worldly duties and care
thinking of you all the time

it is better to die
thinking of you
than to live
a few more years of mundane life
without you

Antaryamin
the supporter of my breath
the sustainer of my life
the eternal fountain
quench my thirst
for, I am
very, very thirsty

I have walked a very
long way through life
my feet are bruised
and I can walk no more
I am tired and weary
come, before my mind plunges
in dejection and despair

countless beings strive
to know you
but I am so unworthy
Oh Lord
my madness for you
is without my worthiness
it must be mad of me
so small and insignificant
to even think of attaining

your grace and vision
no, but wait,
you may be the Lord
of the universe
but you are my father first
and however unworthy I am
I have a right to the gift of
your affection and
a claim to your proximity
come and pick me up
in your arms
for my body is restless
and my soul is in agony

I want to die
as it is
I have to die someday
why not now
why not today

the world will
be no more
for me
when I die
let the world be
dead to me
now and today onwards

unless I die and melt
the little 'I' and ego
I will not be born
in spirit
the eternal and everlasting being
which lives even when
the curtain of death has
fallen on the
stage of life

I have learnt my lesson
the body has changed over the years
and yet the 'I' has remained
the same
I wonder who
this never changing 'I' is

I must find out
and therefore I must die
die to this world
for a while and
dive deep within me
and see for myself
who it is that
is ever awake in me
and is a witness
to everything

I cannot be just this body
mere matter; dust going to dust
for you are consciousness
you are life, light and power
and I am a part of you
being your part
I must also necessarily be
consciousness
for only like mixes with like
just as a solid mixes with solids
ether with ether and
liquid with liquid
being part of you
I am life eternal

life is often so cruel
filled with tears
with sorrows and
loneliness

I am alone
there is no one with me
like a lone star
in the sky
the night is dark and
frightening
the lightening
almost rends the
heart apart
sleeping emotions in
this human carcass
rise without intimation
and in alarming
intensity like the
force of nature exhibited in
tornadoes and floods
and storms
so peaceful was
it all before
where, wherefrom comes
this force
this force of nature
of human passion
suddenly trumpeting
like an enemy army
taking one unawares

goodbye my world
I must go and yet
the world with all
its suffering is familiar
and easier to face than the
unknown existence
after death
or is it really unknown
haven't I died a million
times before

haven't I crossed the
frontiers of life
and seen the territory
beyond death
where life lives
in greater reality

my heart is heavy
with tremendous sorrow
I look at my life without you
with great grief
tears roll down my
cheeks without break
my Krishna,
where are you
my heart pines to see you
my soul is restless to be
in your arms
I want to awaken
from my nightmare
I am restless
but you won't come

Does one have to
lose everything in
order to gain you
if even after losing
my all
I do not get you
my heart will break
it would then have
been easier to
at least hold on to the
illusion of worldly
relationships
and be comforted

but you will come
won't you
my heart cries for you
the saints and mystics
have talked of you
in glorious terms
they have told us
you really are
that you are hidden and
that only a soul longing
with love can see you

won't you reveal
yourself to me, God
I want nothing else
I am giving up everything
in my mind
only to get you
yes, just for you
won't you have mercy on me
I can just go on
living life like this
and cling on
to everything I have
but I can't imagine
a life ending in old age
and death
without having a
glimpse of you

won't you come and
put me in wonder
and ecstasy
laughing all the way
through

make me your instrument
and do with me
whatever you wish to do
play your lila through me
I have got a longing
a madness, a restlessness
to see you
because I know now
that you exist
and losing all this
will be worth it
if only you come to me
and reveal yourself
unto me

I am only human
I have weaknesses
in my sorrow at separation
from you
I sob bitterly
and blame you for bringing
a mountain of grief on me
but I have learnt to
see your grace even
in the darkest moments of life
I know that tragedies
of life
bring one closer to you
I think of you
all the time and
wonder what you look like
and how you talk
and how you love
your devotees

they are all right
all the saints about you

you must be the most
beautiful beloved
increase my longing and love
and bhakti for you
so that I become like a
fish without water
and like a drowning man panting for breath
come, my dear
please come
I will give up everything
if only you would come

I have no interest left
in any worldly activity
or pleasure
I want to cry and sob
and pray unto you
to have mercy on me
take away my shallowness
and give me depth of
feelings for you
come, come unto me
my beloved friend
and Father

the world scoffs at me
people reject and
humiliate me
because I constantly think of you
my Lord
and have no heart
in things worldly
I do not indulge in worldly
entertainment or gup-shup
I am not glued to the television
or enthusiastic about cooking various pakwans

books on worldly topics do
not attract me much

I do not have a clever tongue
or furtive inviting glances
clothes and jewelry do
not interest me
in turn I am not interesting
to the world
tell me God,
how to deal with rejection
and insults and humiliation
how to remove sorrow from
my soul and stop feeling sad
when you too do not respond

there is peace and joy
in being with you alone
but you play hide and seek
all the time
you are so mysterious
I can't bear so much sorrow
at being away from you
the sorrow is eating away
at my heart even as the
woodpecker pecks at the wood
and hollows it
I think of the moment when
you will come
and surprise me
like a sunbeam, sudden and
unwarranted

how merciful of you to snap my ties
with the world and
bring me closer to you

you are a real miracle worker
your ways are your own

give me the insight
to see your mercy
and grace and love
in everything that
happens to me
give me the strength
to accept cheerfully
whatever calamity
you send me
let me never lose my
faith in you, the All Merciful
let me love you and
sing your greatness
always
whatever happens to me

I look at myself
a sobbing helpless
human devoid of human dignity
overtaken by grief and
the misery of attachment
and yet there is peace
deep down in my heart

somewhere within me
lies a spectator
the consciousness looking at me
staring at me reminding me
that I am not this body or mind
whatever is happening is
happening to the mind
for mind, yes mind is
the seat of all sorrow
that I should plug

the mind with the Divine
and the onslaughts will
not touch me
yes, that is true
when I am introverted
thinking of the divine
nothing seems to affect me
but when I am extroverted
the influence of the environment
assails me and
I sob and sob bitterly
almost hysterically
when oh when will the
lower mind change into
the higher mind

the same mind soars high
with lofty ideas and visions
alas, the same mind
plunges into an abyss of
lower thoughts and desires

I want to cry and
exhaust myself of my sorrow
but the vessel does not
get empty
there seems to be an
inexhaustible store of tears
hidden somewhere
behind the eyes
the trickle is incessant
and then I think of you
the day you will come
to me and make me yours
you will come
won't you

for otherwise I will
die of grief

It is no use living
without being with you
the nightmare has become
absolutely frightening and
I would rather wish
for the end of my life
if you won't come

I want neither money
nor name nor fame
nor knowledge of scriptures
I just want to love you
and cry like a child in a corner
till you come
till you come and show
me the way and give
me enlightenment

I will keep on calling you
beloved Lord, come, come
please come and
end my sorrowful dream
of this illusionary
world

How many times Oh Divine
have you expressed yourself
within me and yet
how unworthy have I been
to repeatedly
doubt your existence
forgive me
Oh, Merciful Lord

I rose from my body
like a rocket
through the roof
into infinite space

I was amazed
the mental 'I' survived
the physical was only
a sheath, a container

I shot up into the
beautiful blue sky
the blue
I have never seen
in this world

I was afraid to fall down
and with that very thought
I fell down into my body
with lightening speed
like a thud
and I was aware of
coming down

the senses and the mind
started withdrawing
like the gopis to the
tune of Krishna's flute
some magnet inside
pulled them in
Ah, who was this magnet
a real living conscious magnet
within me
I had stood at the threshold between
the conscious and subconscious
only to fly out of my body

suddenly and swiftly
without any effort

the guru in me has
awakened, my friend,
last night I woke up
in my sleep
he was gliding upwards
and I climbed the ladder
the ladder which extended to the heavens above
together we went up into the infinite sky
vast open and awe-inspiring
yes, together we went up into
the infinite sky
I, nervous and afraid
he, confidently guiding me
up and up we went
I walked as if for thousands of miles
and was tired
I could go no further
I had reached the second summit
there the two of us became one
and I woke up with a click
I had seen the oneness of
guru and disciple
in spirit

we do not have
an eternity to live
we have already been
on the road
for too long now
the snow that
covered the path
is already melting
soon it will be time
to take off our cloaks

and slip out of the door
shall we have time
even to say goodbye
to those we love and cherish.

In the garden
of my life
like a gardener
I came
to sow good seeds
but I got involved
in the anguish
of heat and cold
of praise and insult
and forgot
the very purpose
for which I had
come here on this mortal soil
alas, the day is gone
and the last rays of dusk
are teasing me
one more opportunity gone
one more birth wasted
in the passions of life
will there be
another chance
shall I remember my mistakes
when I come back on this
stage of life again
after serving the sentence of death

the mind
guides and prompts
like a human being
it must be a living
and conscious force
is it divinity

peeping out
of a hole
like the rays of the sun
slanting through
a windowsill

there is so much
evil and suffering
in this world
of such a beautiful
enlightening and
invigorating nature
rape, murder, kidnapping
torture and blackmail
greed for money and power
are the order
of the day
am I feel terribly sad

God made this world
so that human beings
love each other
and admire their creator
and learn how
to return to
their true home

God as creator
must be the unhappiest parent
to see her offspring
suffer so much pain
how does she cope
with so much anguish
and sadness
I wonder

when I meet her
I will see a faint smile
on a face
laced with pain

I came into this world
with a promise
that I will remember
that you exist
and yet, I doubted
your existence
a million times

you lovingly gave me
several signals of
your existence
you spoke to me
like a human being
and yet, I ignored
too many of those signals

I wavered between
faith and doubt
a hundred times
will this faith
never become steady
till you come
and embrace me

and your touch of real flesh
like a divine vision
will awaken my heart
to your reality
and I will bow my head
in utter shame and gratitude
before you
who have always

been mine
but whose allegiance
I denied
a thousand times

my heart grieves
to see little children
without a home
without food and clothing

so very many of them
it is a disgrace
to humanity itself

greed and selfishness
have dulled and blunted
the human soul
alas, will those in power
awaken at last
and take care of
the little gods
with innocent faces
sadness evident
in their faint smiles
and helplessness deep
in their glances

the negativity and nagging
the rejection and disapproval
of those we love
corrodes the soul's creativity
and brings death
to inspiration and growth

the assimilation and approval
a word of encouragement
a glance of sympathy

unfolds the vast arenas
of mind and lifts
the soul to sublime heights

the greater the awareness
of human misery
the greater the pain
the growing sensitivity
to human suffering
gives one more sadness
and robs one of a
gladdened heart

soul is a part of God
and if the human soul yearns for
deep and unselfish love
God surely must pine for sheer love
of his devotees for him
Oh God, make me love you
for the sake of love
it is wonderful just to belong to you
I want nothing else from you
just make me yours
let us be best friends
the real 'yaars'

desire ends
only when we put an
end to it
and then there is peace

let me pass each day saying
shukra hai shukra hai
for your innumerable gifts
of love and guidance
what can I give you in return
whatever I have

is given by you alone
make me see you in your creation
so that I can serve you
without ego and deceit
with compassion and love infinite

I am the woman outside
you are the woman inside me
I want to communicate with you
for, you have intelligence
far superior to mine

I need your wisdom
and the hidden hand of guidance
to illumine my path
to protect me and lead me on
to regions of life, light and power
where there is pure joy
and no sorrow

I live in a rented house
I must vacate when
the landlord summons
yea when the call of death comes
I will have to vacate
this body
and leave at once
there will be no time
to breathe one more breath

my spirit will soar high
to the seventh heaven
and I will behold
the face of God
my creator there
shall I ask him
why this drama of creation



of a script already written
will that be the end
of all anguish of all pain
or will that again be
the beginning of another drama
on yet another plane of consciousness.



Prema Baxi, Sannyasi Vishwaprem, was born in 1938 in Sehwan, Sindh (presently Pakistan). Her correspondence with Sri Swami Satyananda Saraswati started in 1955. In 1958, they met in Rajnandgaon where she received mantra diksha, becoming one of his first disciples.

She accompanied her husband, Upendra Baxi, an eminent scholar, to Australia, UK, USA, Europe, South East Asia and Africa. Mother of two children and a lawyer, she maintained her relationship with her guru and the Bihar School of Yoga, and was instrumental in obtaining university status for Bihar Yoga Bharati.

In 2003, Vishwaprem received karma sannyasa diksha from Swami Niranjanananda. She and Upendra currently reside in Delhi.



SATYANANDA YOGA
BIHAR YOGA

My Spiritual Journey with Swami Satyananda is the story of a spiritual quest: a young girl in search of answers to her many questions about the purpose of life and death. She writes to Swami Sivananda of the Divine Life Society, Rishikesh, for guidance, but is referred to Swami Satyananda. Thus, in 1955 a lifelong relationship starts between guru and disciple. Swami Satyananda advises the young woman on her spiritual practice, *sadhana*, but also on what to eat, what to wear and the company to keep.

He encourages her to live fully in the world and to remain a *sadhaka* always. Vishwaprem tells of her struggles to find a balance between the joy of being a wife and mother and the desire to pursue her spiritual path.

My Spiritual Journey with Swami Satyananda is a straightforward account of a modern-day spiritual aspirant. Vishwaprem shares with her readers doubts, frustrations and the exhilarating experiences of spiritual practice. Above all she gives them glimpses into the depth and beauty of the eternal guru-disciple relationship. It is testimony that spiritual life is possible against all odds if sincerity, perseverance and faith prevail.



[bar code here]

ISBN : 978-93-81620-90-8